

Halo: Cloaked Shield

by Dark Ethereal Shadow

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Summary: It's been over a decade of peace between all species when another Covenant Remnant group has reared its ugly head from the depths of the stars and into the light of the galaxy, sparking another unwanted war for many others including two great powers, and this time this Remnant are even more fanatical in their goals in getting what they want, no matter what stands in their way.

1. Prologue: Nothing But Ocean

****Disclaimer:** I do not own Halo or My Little Pony. They belong to Microsoft/343 Industries and Hasbro respectfully but all original content is mine.**

****A/N:** And once more into the breach, the real 'honest to god' one this time. This here is the rewrite of the prologue and the beginnings of the restart of this story.** F**urther explanation at the bottom.**

****Prologue: Nothing But Ocean****

* * *

><p>It was a frigid cold moonless night but the stars were out, lighting up the sky like guiding torches to show the way home, like the Princess of the Night had intended herself to do so.<p>

The wooden deck thrummed underneath his hooves, purring happily as the two propellers astern, fed by twin reciprocating steam and magical tome engines built by Equestria's finest lead shipbuilding company _Star and Chaser_, drove the odd thirty tonne, seven hundred and ninety meter long, twin funnel, crystal white and steel grey painted passenger liner through the tranquil surface of the ocean.

He didn't need a watch to remind him the time. By his honed years of experience at sea, by his reckoning it was almost an hour till midnight, his shifts around the foredeck for the night-shift coming to a close.

The pine brown earth stallion, a crewmember serving aboard the leading and last remaining of the Equestrian Navy and Merchant Shipping _New Harmony _class of liners**, ** walked easy across the wooden deck as delighted voices of:

"Wonderful night, isn't it dear?"

"A great evening, it is."

Came from a few passengers who have taken upon themselves to brave the cold night air and view the peaceful calm.

With hoof under chin as he rested easy on the railing near the bow, the crew pony on night-watch observed as the glass smooth surface of the sea below parted aside by the angled prow, and he began to ponder in excitement as to how so many things have changed for the better for everypony in Equestria, ever since they steamed out of the Gryphon Empire's protective waters three days ago.

While he continued his train of thought about what things the Royal Ambassadorial Party aboard would bring about with the new treaty reached between both kinds, he pushed away from the railing and gazed up at the common show of an aurora borealis.

A combined spectacular display of colours, dancing with the stars in the night sky above, the vibrant dazzling hues of purple and the rose red of this show tonight dominating over the neon greens, blues and pinks of the previous nights.

Another great treat to his end shift on another graceful night provided by hers truly.

The pony exhaled the deep refreshing breath he had taken in earlier with a content sigh.

That's when everything that was so perfect to be true took a turn for the worst, as the ship decided to take an abrupt detour to starboard and down a massive rolling face of a wave, like it was plunging headfirst into the bowels of Tartarus itself.

The ship was erratic, jarring nonstop like a thing possessed, as if it ploughed straight into pack ice and kept going.

Buckets, silverware, anything else inside or out with some kind of magnetic property, shot forward for the bow of the ship. A pony waitress in the first class galley was almost pegged to the opposite wall when a flurry of forks and spoons raced at her from opening cutlery drawers behind her.

The abrupt dive sent the startled earth pony sprawling onto his back, as well as waking everpony on board from their slumber, casting the off duty crew out from their reasonably comfy bunk beds.

His eyes were wide, pupils shrunk to the size of pinpricks, and mouth open in horrified shock as he stared up at what had become of the

breath-taking sky above. The earth stallion remained on his back as other ponies belonging to the crew or the passengers that had stayed up this late, scrambled in a feverish yet organised frenzy to get back to wherever was safe.

A pony stopped to haul the shell-shocked earth up to his hooves, and proceeded next to give him a hard slap across his face.

The slap was never to be as the two were suddenly collected and swept across the deck when the ship reached the bottom of the rogue wave they had rode down on that then spilled over the prow and gunwales like it didn't exist.

The churning white water blasted across the open deck like a dam had burst open; catching both crew and some passengers alike right into its tossing embrace, hurling them unforgivingly into the metal walls but not overboard.

As the lightning continued to crash overhead with the diaphragm-rumbling roll of thunder, the flashes illuminated a new danger that loomed ahead in the night, much to the dark blue unicorn with a white beard standing on the port bridge wing horrified shock.

The captain of the ENMS New Harmony mouth fell open, eyes wide the size of dinner plates when a section of the sea " about three miles out " began draining away. Two unbroken walls of geysers of spray blasting high into the air, as the ocean itself between them then began to part aside, revealing nothing but a sheer drop into inky blackness.

"Captain! The maelstrom, it's sucking us in!" A holler from his first officer roused the captain from his petrified place on the bridge.

That looked nothing like any whirlpool he'd ever seen but there was no time to argue as he bellowed to the stallion at the helm, racing with horn aglow for the engine order telegraphs with his counterpart, "HARD TO PORT!"

"Aye, sir! Hard to port!"

As the wheel was turned for the ordered direction, in simultaneous ringing dings, both telegraphs were changed from: Full Ahead to Full Astern.

A junior officer near the helm watched through the rain pelted bridge windows, his body trembling in dread like every other pony as the liner continued to plough through the raging sea straight for it, urging faintly through gritted teeth, "Come onâ€| turnâ€| turnâ€|"

The gap in the ocean ahead continued to spread wider and wider, coming closer and closer while the storm above growing in intensity, the pelting rain now coming down in sheets.

"Is it hard over?!" the first officer yelled in extreme agitation, gravely awaiting an answer as sweat and rain raced down his face.

"It is, yes, sir, hard over!"

Still dead ahead, the gap in the sea had spread so wide that, when another series of lighting bolts speared into it, by Celestia's mane, the captain could've sworn he had seen a six silhouetted outlined shapes of a pod of Blue Whales and their calves on the opposite side of the ever-expanding, held back wall of water.

Then, with a slight tilting to the deck, and much to the grateful relief of all the crew and captain, the ship began to veer away.

Resounding cheers of pure elation was overcome by the applause of hooves that went up from everpony on board as the ship continued on its danger dodging turn.

The ship had spared from the disaster.

They had been saved.

Saved . . .

Saved that is until everything else took another terrible turn, this time for the total loss and unfortunate turn of events in the entirety of Equestria's recorded maritime history.

As the ship turned starboard side on with the ocean anomaly, it allowed the gusting winds astern that had come in with the storm, to blow a full gale against the other side of the hull, giving an unwarranted helping hoof at pushing the ship back to it, much to the shear heart wrenching horror of everypony on the bridge and those who were still above decks.

With the portside now acting like a gigantic metal sail and under the ever sucking pull of the ocean draining underneath, the stern end of the passenger liner slewed about, its rear now pointing arse first to the ocean anomaly until it slithered out over the edge. The propellers that were still churning vigorously in reverse were now beating uselessly at empty air.

In desperation to prevent the ship from going any further, the two anchors at the bow were released, their chains rumbling out in a clattering clamour as the ship eased even further out over the precipice, taking on a ever so slightly incline tilt to its decks.

More lightning from the menacing wreathed sky struck out again overhead. One bolt hit the forward funnel of the liner with another striking the same place a scant second later. The unfathomable surges of power delivered from the lightning strikes caused the protective magical lightning rod of the stack to overload.

As the anchors that had splashed overboard into the roaring ocean below, they firmly snagged something on the sea bottom and brought the liner to a jarring stop, just when a third strike hit the same place on the forward funnel.

The overtaxed rod couldn't take it and detonated.

In a bright, almost blinding flash, a wave of hazy purplish blue

casted out an electromagnetic pulse that travelled up and down throughout the entirety of the ship.

The pulse from the blast knocked out everything electrical or that used power.

The lighting, the radios, the two crew ponies still actively using the radiotelegraph in haste to put out distress calls for help, and not to mention that it played havoc with every unicorn and sole alicorn aboard abilities to perform life saving spells of any fashion.

All this occurring chaos however paled in comparison on what was to follow next. As the captains' grim attention was focused from what was happening to his sure to be doomed ship to the screams of terrified pony passengers resonating from every part of the liner, a sort of deep, reverberating, droning of a rumble like thunder above started to increase in volume after each passing second.

Looking up from the wing bridge of his stricken vessel, he could suddenly bear witness to see a massive bulbous blunt yet elegantly curved shape in the sky bearing down on them through the storm clouds above. In fact, whatever this thing that was coming for them, it looked as if it wanted to head directly for the wide-open inky blackness of a trench they were balancing over.

"Sweet mother of Celestia!" the captain breathed his last before he was flung backwards with force, flinging him overboard with two other officers as the immense celestial object clipped the ocean faring ship.

It wasn't much of a groan and splinter, as it was more along the lines of the End of the World metal tearing CRUNCH when the tip of one of the four fins protruding from the underside of the immense purple prow made contact with the exposed overhanging stern, just behind the second funnel, cutting straight through like a hot knife through butter.

The impact not only served to sever most of the entire rear half off, it also served to pull the rest of the ship, snapping the two lifeline anchor chains from the bow like wet twine, plummeting into the dark embrace of the void.

By the time the ENMS Zephyr arrived an hour later at the given latitude and longitude coordinates according to the received SOS distress call from the stricken liner ENMS New Harmony, there was nothing left but the clearing of the reported storm.

No maelstrom looking whirlpool.

No immense void in the ocean.

No bottomless abyss.

No ship.

No wreckage.

No lifeboats.

Not one sign of the recorded one thousand, four hundred and eighty three passenger souls on board that it took on after it departed on its fiftieth transatlantic voyage from the Gryphon Empire back to Equestria.

Although it would be many hours until the news of this tragedy would reach the two princess sisters in Canterlot, the tragic news of the ship's lost at sea status and who was on it when it vanished, would send heavy grief stricken shockwaves throughout the both of them, an empire, the rest of pony kind in Equestria and to one very one-off town by the name of

Ponyville.

* * *

><p>AN: I'm dearly sorry to say/type/report that this story is being rewritten/overhauled and certain events may not have occurred/chapters cut/characters cut/moved around or have been rewritten in a different order.**

'_Why?! Why are you doing this!? WHY NOW!_' all of you start yelling into my ear to ask?

***Sigh* Well there are many reasons. And I've thought hard and weighted my options on it for a while, and the outcome far outweighs the negatives in my eyes on this one and have already started.**

Many of which that are tightly linked behind other reasons that would take so long to explain for this but mostly it's because now that I have had the chance to "broaden" "clean up" my knowledge and ideas as well as existing knowledge on the multi-links of both the MLP: FiM and Halo universes, emotional ties between characters, and magic = supreme technology that go hand and hoof with each other.

The story wasn't heading in the correct direction and it was taking too long to get there.

I'm saying/typing this because I don't want to be content to continue to be the full-blown, naïve, sadistic, and heartless one-sided brain bitch bloody bastard (There. I said it and I deserve it! Seriously.) I was back then when I first conceived to write this.

That being said, the prologue to the revamped/rewritten version that will be also available on the fimfiction site that I have an account on. Ethereal Shadow, just remove the 'Dark' from the front of my pen name here.

** - 'Dark' Ethereal Shadow.**

P.S. I suggest removing/deleting your reviews for the chapters since they won't make sense.

2. Chapter 1: The Galaxy is a Weird Place

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Microsoft/343 Industries and Hasbro respectfully but all original content is mine.**

****Chapter 1: The Galaxy is a Weird Place****

* * *

><p>There was nothing to see out there.<p>

No radiating warmth from the stars. No thrilling views of planets, their many unique colours and forms they come in. No cosmic sights such as moons orbiting objects that trapped them with their own gravitational pull, smears of nebulae displaying stupendous colours, chunks of rock and ice of all sizes hurtling through the depths of space to God knows where.

Just not one single one of these, at all, period.

Nothing but complete and infinite darkness to the eye.

Infinite darkness if you had organic eyes that is.

Smart-class Artificial Intelligence Leio: Serial number LO 0876-8, age three years, belonged to the Combined Sangheili Empire, carefully observed the ever changing quantum filaments that were, what only she could see, intricate gravitational influxes caused by the many celestial objects they were passing by in the normal plane.

She detected a troubling amount of turbulence acting around the United Nations Space Command _Gallipoli_ that made up this realm of reality.

The UNSC _Gallipoli_.

Motto: ****_Duty Ante Nos_**** - Duty Before Us.

Commissioned as a _Stalwart_-class light frigate. Battle scarred, a decorated service career including several battle engagement commemorations, and still going strong dating back to the middle years of the Great War. The almost three decade years of genocide conflict between humanity and the religious alien conglomerate of species known as the Covenant.

This particular one was just one of three of the specific eleven sets of non-dimensions existing brushing against each other like the creases of a crumpled ball of paper, or as it's more simply known to the wider populace as the dimensions of slipspace.

Detecting a less of a disturbed path among the twisted paths of the matrices that make up this plane of slipspace, she nudged the ageing frigate ever so slightly towards it. The stresses acting upon the outer hull lessened while the ship skimmed by the patch of turbulence created by a sun going supernova, not that any member of the crew would ever experience the sight or feel anything of it.

The pedestal near where the commander's chair would've been glowed brightly in a basking soft grey before springing forth from the light, a beautiful form of a female Sangheili in a dress that looked a lot like a roman toga emerged gracefully from it.

Even though she was an AI comprised of just information, created from mapping from the very neural patterns of the donator's brain to the avatar which is just motes of light. She stretched her back and arms just for the fun of it, but also it grabbed the attention of some of the crew, which made her smile.

A low, yet considerate masculine voice started speaking to her in the common Sangheili dialect, "Leio? I trust everything is alright?"

"As far as I can report, Shipmaster. All systems are operating well within their limits and I had to adjust our course to avoid some turbulence." Leio stated, looking over at the imposingly tall for a Sangheili, clad in basic combat harness, albeit deep crimson with a white trim.

"Was it of much difficulty?" he asked, giving the slightest hint of concern in his tone only she could've pick up on.

"Not even a shudder this time," she shrugged, expressing little worry. The AI knew fully why he was looking for an answer. Just because the last he asked about such a thing about a in-slipspace course correction, the results she gave wasn't that bad in her eyesâ€

There was a resounding irked clack as the sangheili shipmaster pressed his mandibles together. "I would like it if you apprised me of anything else like it before you do it."

â€ Maybe that should have been rephrased as to say: The failure of the energy containment shields, resulting in a decompression of a hangar or two as she made the course adjustment around an anomaly that closely resembled the same effects as being near the event horizon of a black hole.

Leio bowed at the waist slightly, "Of course."

****Breep.****

Both AI avatar and shipmaster turned towards the trill sound. Even though Leio was basically the ship, her lifeblood of code and information flowing through its systems and knowing all, she still turned to the noise out of respect and more so to appear more lifelike and to have feeling of belonging to the crew and military forces stationed aboard.

The source of the beep like noise? A steady flashing light over at a technician's workstation.

The human stationed at the terminal half-turned in his seat, "Shipmaster 'Surum, sir. We are approaching our exit vector given to us by the prowler _Echo of Stars_."

The elite nodded and leaned forwards on the back of the wepps station's chair. The sangheili manning the station didn't pay any attention as his seat reclined a little backwards.

"Leio, ready the drive for transition and inform the rest of the crew while we get in touch with the destroyer escorts."

Said escorts, _Halberd_-class Mk II's - aptly named Halberd because

of their pointed arrowhead hull design to the original, and Mk II because of the retrofit for in-atmosphere capabilities and manoeuvrability - _Call Me Maybe_ and _Arkhangelsk_ were what task force the _Gallipoli_ was key centre to.

Task group _Bellerophon_. This group was one of the few rapid response battlegroups out there that are only crewed of a fifty-fifty mix of both humans ****and**** sangheili.

"It will be done," the AI quipped off cheerfully.

The motes of light that made her form dissipated and she vanished from her podium in compliance of the orders. 'Surum and the rest of the bridge crew started on the procedures for the decorated aging frigate's exit.

* * *

><p>Recreation room. Deck 12, Room C.

The spacious rec room was typically full to over-crowded like it had been yesterday, but tonight it had no more than two-dozen people. A mix match of Marines and elites of various rank, a few technicians, and two helljumpers.

Of the number, over half were watching a recorded replay of last nights live Ricochet championships finals game, discussing tactics, mistakes and plays while in a booth, far off in the corner sat the two Orbital Drop Shock Troopers, casually talking to each other while playing a holographic turn based strategic board game of the series 'Fleet Battles: Human/Covenant War'.

The steel grey door to the rec room slid open with an almost silent hiss to reveal a hunched over lone Sangheili, clad fully in dark wine red Special Operations combat harness. The swept back helmet with a curved bright blue visor was attached to its harness.

The elite took a cursory glance around the room with its green eyes, before its gaze settled on the the two ODSs in the corner. Without making much of a sound, other than the noises of its armour plates sliding against each other as it moved, the elite casually strode over and pulled up a study chair to watch the miniature battle from the sidelines with piqued interest.

The supported formation of a CCS-class battlecruiser fragmented apart violently on Lance Corporal Nathan O' Donnell's screen as MAC rounds gutted it from stem to stern from two attacking trident formation of _Paris_-class frigates, much to his annoyance as well as the deep chuckling laughter that emanated from the observing SpecOps elites' throat nearby.

"So do you see my predicament here, Hark?" Nathan O'Donnell asked the other trooper, his Australian accent tracing back to where he was born and raised for a good time of his life before he joined the corps. The atypical Sydneysider.

The other helljumper, the one called Hark, watched as Nathan rolled his holodice, "Yeah, I do. But come on Nate, do you really think she'll go for it? I mean, think about it for a second. Her name is Violet after all, why not Cass?"

If anyone were to ask the difference between Corporal Jason Harkness accent patterns, most would typically say about his Republic of America accent could be distinguishable by pitch alone in any weather condition, even one during the worst of blizzards. He also has a twisted way of impersonating voices of people as a party trick when he's drunk, in particular girlish voices.

Nathan scratched the tip of his shaven chin, thinking about what his best friend in the corps was suggesting but dismissed it with a casual wave and lined out his shots for the next phase. He rolled the boarding action dice for two ships, "Nah, you're overthinkin' it. Vi is definitely the one. Now, are we playing this or what?"

Jason sighed dejected and he rolled his own dice to see if Nathan was successful on the attempts. The dice revealed that he had made a success on one but before he could roll again for the other, the frigate they were on wide alarm for general quarters went off.

"Aw nuts. Well, we know the music," Hark stated, hardly looking up at the noise as the marines in the room scrambled out as fast as they could, the others and the elites followed soon after the rushing marines.

"To be continued then?" Nathan asked, saving the game's progress onto a data chip and depositing the chip into his back pocket.

The SpecOps elite that had been quietly watching the game stood, slipping its helmet on as it did before striding calmly for the exit.

"Yeah sure," Hark said looking behind over his shoulder. The room was empty. "Now come on. It's time to get off this perfectly good flying brick, kick ass and take names by hard-core son-of-a-bitch marines!"

"Ooh-rah to that!" Nathan smirked at Harks comment and jogged for the door.

* * *

><p>Princess Luna's dream started out routinely enough.<p>

She told the Tantabus to do its worst like usual, and as usual, it did. But then halfway through its punishing deeds she had created it for it all went sideways. The Tantabus had suddenly shrieked in pure animalistic fear, withdrawing its tendrils of the purple fog made of nightmare fuel from around her and disintegrated into wavy wispy pieces, with whatever had remained behind was blown away a sudden gusty wind.

Luna screamed out mentally in fear and worry. _No. No No No No! Not again!_ as the floor beneath her hooves was suddenly violently swept away.

She fell through the pit of darkness as throbbing pain tore through her mind while blinding flashes of pure white light, blurred shapes, and changing scenery ranging from a setting sun, an ocean, to towering mountains continued to show up before her eyes. While this still happened a wide variety of distorted and distant voices began

etching through her mind like a claw nails down a blackboard.

'_Do you think this is wiseâ€¦ I HAVE SEENâ€¦ if only thouâ€¦ WHEN YOU HAVE ASKEDâ€¦ the sickness followedâ€¦'_

_ Weren't it notâ€¦ AS I HAVE LISTENEDâ€¦ was another wayâ€¦ for thee be safeâ€¦ THROUGH ROCKâ€¦'_

_ But would weâ€¦ AND METALâ€¦ condemn thee to not knowâ€¦ and yet need to knowâ€¦ AND TIME!_

_ THEY WILL YIELDâ€¦ nay, it best theyâ€¦ AS ALL WORLDS HAVE BEFOREâ€¦ look out for each other and othersâ€¦ TO THE FATE THEY MUST ABIDE!_'

The myriad of voices screamed out as one in unending suffering agony at the harsher of the voices and the flashes of changing scenery cut to black as she made contact with something solid.

Opening her eyes a crack, Luna found herself standing atop a grassy hill. She immediately squeezed them shut.

Out there, snaking away out ahead was a narrow dirt path that headed directly into a dense pine forest.

Luna knew what the path detailed, where it went.

She had traversed this vision of a single trail through the forest many times over to know by memory what lay at the end, and she definitely didn't want to experience it again. But again, just like every other time, her legs refused to listen to reason of her mind and started to move her down along this path, whether she liked it or not...

* * *

><p>Cryo Bay 02, Cryo Unit 07.

The frigid cold air tickled his burning lungs as he tried to open his eyes in the bright blue light, when he did, he thought he caught the blurred shape of something standing in front of him.

"Take a deep breath and swallow," said the blurred image.

He did as suggested. However it had the immediate effect of triggering the gag reflex and to make him almost collapse to his knees to the gridded deck, all the while violently coughing up the long loogie looking white surfactant from his burning lungs. "Oh god, that stuff is disgusting!"

"Always tastes the same doesn't it, Lorenski?"

The reddish haired woman standing before him was of Eurasian descent, born Cascade as far as he knew as Maria K. Taylor, as she remarked with a sly smile while she watched her close friend and teammate groggily get back onto his feet and rub his face miserable like.

"Yeah, it does. No matter how many times they change the flavour of the formula, it still tastes like lime flavoured mucus, yelch!"

The male spartan was Michael C. Lorenski, born Luna, Mare Nubium. Lived his younger years on the planet Emerald Cove. He had black hair with silver streaks running through it and multiple scars all over his body from plasma burns. One scar in particular was more visible than most and that was a grisly faded one that ran from his left temple, going behind the ear before ending at the base of the back of his neck.

Lorenski coarsely coughed again to clear the remainder of the substance from his throat and began to draw in the frigidly cold air through his nose.

"So, dream well?" she said locking her arctic blue stare with his glacier green ones.

Lorenski took in a long breath and stifled a yawn that came shortly with it, "I don't think I've needed to tell you enough that you never dream in cryo, just you get some weird visions of something foreboding that's about to occur in your life, all due to the subconscious of the mind. Why? How much did yours change?"

"A lot. From a sparse open reddish orange canyon to a mix of charging scorpions and warthogs in a sandstorm, you?" Taylor said raising a questioning eyebrow. She'd had fought alongside Lorenski long enough to know that he always seemed to get the oddly weird and cryptic ones, she knew enough about his past.

Lorenski bent over to touch his toes as he continued to go through the motions of the rudimentary exercise that had to be done when coming out of a long suspension in cryo, "A grey metal floor, plasma fire, a few dozen unmoving blurred unrecognisable shapes then open blue sky with the tips of pine trees on the edges, and that was it."

Taylor rapped her knuckles against the outside of inactive cryochamber eight next to his. It was the one she had been suspended in a little over awhile ago, "Huh, that's more vague than everything else you've gotten. You wouldn't happen to know what all of it means?" the last bit said in a joking manner.

"Nope, not in the faintest this time," he said with a sad shake of the head and started on checking over his titanium nanocomposite bodysuit.

The bodysuit was what had the hard points that connected all the external armour to a body of a spartan supersoldier. It also added that extra protection from ballistic and plasma based weaponry. For any problems that he missed now that might arise later, will greatly hinder the attachment of his armour components.

"So, good to go?" she asked with a smile.

"Yeah," he jumped twice in quick succession, getting the blood pumping more to his extremities. "All set, how 'bout you, Mia?"

"I'm fine, you're the lucky bastard who got the luxury of an extra half-hour of cryo time. So, yeah, I'm good."

Oh great, what did I miss out on this time? he thought but his

mouth had other ideas.

"Oh lucky me..." he quipped off sarcastically as the ship-wide PA system activated overhead with the frigate's smart AI Leio coming over it.

"_**Attention all hands. The Gallipoli and her escorts are nearing the designated exit slipspace jump coordinates. Make sure that all equipment is safely stored and secured for transition.**_"

"Armoury then?" Lorenski asked as the message over the PA was repeated.

"Meh, it's always given, Mike. We're spartans, and taking into account on what always seems to lie at the other end of a jump, there is alwaysâ€" "

"_**All hands, prepare for transition in sevenâ€| sixâ€|**_"

"â€"Trouble to be stirred into something wicked," he said finishing her statement off as the deck rumbled with a reverberating thrum.

* * *

><p>UNSC Gallipoli's bridge.**

The frigate's navigator looked at his watch out of habit, "... fourâ€| threeâ€| twoâ€| Mark!"

The _Gallipoli_ shuddered as a wash of electric blue like static travelled over the exterior of the hull and the frigate exited the physics rule-breaking realm of subspace. The billions upon billions of the scattered masses of un-twinkling white pricks of stars of the galaxy sprung up on external cameras and forward view screens.

Of one thing to note as the destroyer escorts slipped into view a few thousand dozen kilometres away on either side, the planet in question they were here to investigate the sudden Covenant Remnants interest in, the little blue dot of the planet showed up dead centre of the forward view screen.

"Helm, new course. Burn seven-seven-two by zero-six-zero. Wepps, bring weapon systems online."

"Shipmaster Thel 'Surum, are we expecting them to ambush us so early?" Xavier Viago â€" the _Gallipoli_'s second-in-command said warily, turning to face the sangheili shipmaster as the frigate adjusted to the new heading, her two destroyer escorts following suit one after another.

"We may be of few, Viago," 'Surum replied, his jaws flexing strongly with an air of wariness. "But the potency and first strike capability of human ships are still enough to be of concern in their eyes even if commanded by people of less experience."

"Hyperion's aren't to be much to laugh at either,"

"To which we do not carry."

"Because of the hawking radiation emissions when transitioning. Excavation grade HAVOK's on the other hand..." the officer trailed off with and moved to the woman manning the communications terminal who had caught his eye, "Hmm, what is it?"

"Sir, Call Me Maybe has retrieved the intelligence package beacon left behind by the prowler before she left the system."

The XO leaned over her shoulder to have a look, "_Echo of Stars_? The forty-eight hour advance?"

"Yes sir."

"Good. Ask them to transfer the recovered data over and put it up on screen two."

"Aye, sir, screen two," her fingers danced and dragged across the holo-keyboard and glass like screens. "Bringing it up now."

First off, it was just lines upon lines of random and jumbled bits of code before a decryption key was imputed to start unscrambling the transfer of data. As the data became readable, most of the very first things displayed were the number of planets and celestial landmarks found in this system.

"Nine core planets with a single white-yellow star, of the nine four are gas planets, our target is the third from the sun and has one moon, expansive asteroid belt between the third and fourth planets..." Leio started to list off even though she wasn't prompted and the bridge became alive of whispered and spoken thoughts.

"Kinda looks a bit like Sol really," remarked a crewmember as he observed the information for himself.

"A bit? Are you kidding me!?" remarked another sitting near him. "The entire system look like someone came along and went copy n' paste, and don't get me started on the Jupiter lookalike that's blue and green!"

"... Atmosphere is a typical nitrogen oxygen mix, so it's breathable, nothing new to note thereâ€¦"

"So?" another one asked.

"So?! For fucks sake, just look at the spot in the lower half!"

Yep, it was true. There was a massive swirling storm spiralling in the lower hemisphere, but all this wasn't the most disconcerting, as what came next was the information regarding the predicted orbits, which revealed a few glaringly obvious anomalies.

Xavier inputted his own observations on the matter, "Hmm, apparently the entire system here orbits around the third planet, and that includes the star."

"It doesn't take a bloody genius to know why the Shadowed Blade found this place so tantalizing. A **star**•a massive active ball of fusion•that revolves around a planet. Got to be at least some freaky powerful source at play there, one heck of a navigation hazard too if I ever saw one," a male crewmember spoke his thoughts about

the situation before frowning as he recalled something. "How did the over zealous cloaking freaks find this place anyway? I thought the recovered information we got from Janus Key showed everything?"

The girl at the comm station inputted her own words to the answer, "The data from the Key showed zilch, I heard it has something to do with an Forerunner artefact that was taken during a raid on the Facility on Aegis Seven."

The guy who asked was aghast, "No way?! Aegis-VII?! They would've had to go through the grid to get there!"

"Yeah? And they had the same damn setup the Midnight Facility did and now look what happened because of the measures. As to how they found the damn ONI backwater station in the first place, that is way beyond my pay grade pal," she retorted.

Leio coughed getting Xavier's attention from the crew but not from shipmaster 'Surum still studying the system projected from the centre of the holotable, "I'd hate to interrupt your discussion but the Arkhangelsk has detected impulse drives belonging to two seraph squadrons. Looks like a patrol picket."

"Have they detected us?" Xavier inquired.

The AI shook her head and placed a hand near the curveblade attached to her hip. "Negative. Although it would be prudent that they are to be dealt with soon, you know, before they uncover how many there are of us here and bug out to warn the rest."

"How far?" 'Surum said, still not looking up from his observation of the representation of the planet's surface.

"At their current velocity and ours... fourteen minutes separation, give or take a minute before they will be on us."

"Turn loose Echo Three and Two," the shipmaster waved a hand dismissively in her direction.

She took the hint, nodding in understanding and disappeared from her on the bridge podium to give the escort Broadsword pilots and navigators their orders personally.

"Is this as much detail the prowler could manage?" Shipmaster 'Surum said as he indicated to the displayed images of the planet's surface. "I thought you humans had better imaging and mapping technology on your stealth vessels?"

"We do, but according to the observational notes here and if I'm interpreting them correctly," Xavier furrowed his brow in concentration as he ran his finger underneath the line of scientific words he was reading. "'Apart from the sun orbiting the planet, the inability to acquire clean imaging scans of the entire surface of the planet is highly likely due to a variety of different influencing factors. Most of these key influencers include: High and low concentrations of electromagnetic radiation, gamma and various unknown type of neutrino radiation emissions as well as sporadic unusual weather anomalies.'_"

Apart from the electronic noises of terminals whirring, the bridge

fell silent for a few, and in between those minutes twin simultaneous flashes of white blue pin picks appeared against the black backdrop of space.

The comm came alive briefly with chatter from a deep male sounding broadsword pilot, "_Echo Two to Gallipoli Actual. Targets neutralized. Returning to previous escort duty with Echo Three._"

"Gallipoli Actual copies, Seraph scouts destroyed."

"Can these interferences be used beneficially?"

Xavier was taken completely off guard by 'Surum's abrupt question. It was so much in fact that he didn't quite know just what the elite had asked, "I'm sorry, sir, what?"

"If we were to park our ships near the surface, over by one or two of these marked high concentration areas, would our foes still be able to detect us?"

"Uhhhâ€¦" Xavier turned back to the information acquired from the once observing prowler and went through the data again. "By direct line of sight they would, not fooling anyone like that, but as the data here is telling me, they will have a more than a difficult time using their scanners to successfully get a lock on our position due to this interference clutter. But this is a double edged sword sir, it goes for us too."

"The time until sunset for this continent?" 'Surum said, clearly forgoing the part about the double edged sword.

Leio popped up on the holo-pedestal, "Three hours. Surprisingly this planet has an exact twenty-four hour day/night cycle. Twelve day from sunrise right on the dot of six am, to sunset at six pm and vice-versa for the night cycle, the moon rises and sets with the night every time."

"What is last known position of most of the Remnant ships?"

"Last count was of fifteen, all last reported holding steady between the world of interest and the fourth red rock. Three capital ships, four battlecruisers, and the rest: a mix-match of corvettes and destroyers as support. Also detected, even with the anomalies that are ever prevalent on the planet of interest, are heavy energy signatures relating to cloaking towers or teleportation spires and dark zone generators on all three main continents, less periodic over the surface of the one you're indicating to."

Xavier was at a loss, as was everybody else including the female lieutenant, half turned in her seat, manning the frigate's navigation controls, "Sir, what are you suggesting?"

"Doing, not suggesting," he stated quite curtly.

"Okay then, what are we ****doing**** then, sir?"

"An into atmosphere slip-jump," he said indicating to a specific point on the holographic representation of the continent on the world he inquired about. A long and wide running gorge bordering a dense

forest, west-south-west of the center of the two heaviest concentrations of emissions.

Both of Xavier's eyebrows went up but quickly returned as his eyes narrowed. _Ahhh, right._

He finally understood what his sangheili captain was planning. He kinda wished he had been the one to come up with it, he needed to be faster on the ball next time. He turned to Leio, "Can it be done?"

She stroked the lower half of her jaws in contemplation, "Difficult but not impossible."

"Leio, can you do it?"

She took on what looked like self-assurance stance for a sangheili and smiled, "Just say the word."

* * *

><p>Main Armoury, Deck 3, one deck above primary hangar.

Spartan Lorenski stepped out of the armour assembly machine, turning his hands and flexing his fingers before testing the rest of his body. It felt great to get back into his armour, always felt like a second skin to him.

The master gunnery sergeant admired the dark steel blue and midnight purple spartan clad in MJOLNIR [Gen2] Powered Assault Armour/FOTUS-class. It is a class of armour that has incorporated reversed engineered Forerunner technology by 343 Industrial.

"So, how'd it feel?" the MgySgt remarked as he watched the spartan move around the bay slowly in it.

"Like I never left, sir." Lorenski replied with noticeable glee.

"Ha, I'll bet," the MGYsgt chuckled as he waved a data pad in his hand, "I need to give your armour a few checks over before I can let you off the hook and do kicking ass stuff, alright?"

Lorenski nodded and stick figure posed: Arms out, legs spread. The gunnery sergeant moved close and began tapping a few inputs into the pad and checking them. After a full minute, he lowered the pad with a questioning look.

"Okay, I've got good news and I've got bad news. Good news most of everything checks out, the bad news however your targeting, radio comms, and shielding systems don't. But this is nothing to cause a panic over as it is still good news, there are just some minor discrepancies, really simple fixes, easily done in the field but we're going to rectify that now to save timeâ€¦ and maybe a little face, yeah?"

Under his helmet, Lorenski raised an eyebrow and he asked in a questioning tone, "What do you need me to do?"

"Just stay put and keep doing what you're doing. We're going to start with your targeting systems first thing, then I going to let EJ deal with your comms systems and shielding when he is done with Spartan Taylor." still looking at his datapad, he gestured with a thumb over his shoulder to the huragok.

Easily Adjusted or EJ for short, one of the two resident engineers on-board was running one of its tentacles over Mia's helmet that was part of her MJOLNIR [Gen 2] Powered Assault Armour/Pathfinder-class, manufactured by Imbrium Machine Complex.

A glint of reflected light off from an electric blue visor caught Lorenski's eye, and he shifted his head ever so slightly to look beyond her. Standing back there, almost immobile as they talked to each other, were two Special Operations Sangheili, both clad fully head to toe in their deep wine red SpecOps armour and an energy sword hilt ' that when activated, glowed a bright crimson red ' each on their legs.

He personally knew and worked with the closest sangheili standing near Mia, a competent warrior by the name of Xytas 'Doravoai.

A master in the arts of blade combat and Close Quarters Combat, and holder of the title of Swordmaster in the complex sangheili culture, that is if the prefix of 'ai' at the end of his bloodline name didn't give it away first. The other sangheili standing by him however, Lorenski knew little about.

Yes, she was a female sangheili, which was rare sight on the battlefield but they are also a someone not to be made fun of especially if it came during to proving one's self, if most the plentiful rumours he had heard about how the female sangheili warriors were true.

Feyo 'Nraham. Lorenski believed he had heard her name was.

"Alright spartan, look up for me here please."

Lorenski took his gaze away from the two elites and looked at the gunnery sergeants' data pad he was holding above his head, then to the side as the man moved the pad to a different spot.

As this was happening in the meantime, the engineer offered Taylor back her helmet.

"Thanks, EJ," she nodded curtly, putting the helmet back on with an almost silent _hiss_.

The huragok gave a small tilt of its seven eyed eel like head accompanied by a soft cheerful trill in return. He about faced and began drifting off towards where Lorenski stood spreadeagled, still following the data pad.

The MGySgt lowered the pad and tapped a few symbols. "Alright, your tracking is good to go. EJ, you're up!"

Taylor watched as the huragok chirped with another soft trill, floated in behind Lorenski and seemingly latched onto his back. She didn't see what the engineer did next, as the comm terminal across from her caught her attention as it began flashing with a message

marked urgent.

Striding quickly and calmly, the master gunnery sergeant reached the terminal and tapped the screen. The letters of urgent disappeared from the screen and the weathered face of the _Gallipoli_'s second-in-command, Xavier Vaigo, showed up on it.

"'Ello, armoury here, what's up?"

"_Are the spartans out of cryo?_" Xavier demanded rashly.

This line of response didn't faze the MGySgt, this was typical because he got the same thing every time. "Yes sir, they're armoured up and rarin' to go to get geared, so are many of the sangheili. I've already got two SpecOps elites of the sort down here all ready."

"_Who have you got?_"

"'Doravoai and 'Nraham, sir."

As the XO and MGySgt conversed heatedly to each other about something that sounded very one-sided and it was happening soon, Spartan Taylor had gotten up and walked over to where Lorenski was still standing awkwardly, the engineer also still attached to his back.

"So, Mike, what does it feel like?" Taylor asked, stopping before him.

Lorenski remained stationary, but she could tell under that helmet of his, he was raising his up eyebrows at her, "What does what feel like, Mia?"

"To have EJ attached to your back," she indicated to the huragok with an armoured finger.

"Annoyingly unbalancing," he muttered, shifting his shoulders slightly. His abrupt movement earned him a chirping huff of annoyance from the engineer still latched back there.

The MGySgt practically yelled at the terminal, "... we're gonna do a what!? When was this planned!?"

The image of Xavier was unfazed, "_Already done and thirty minutes ago, and once we're there and they've geared up, send them to pelican Four-zero-Four awaiting in hangar bay two and don't forget to tell them they have a unit from the 74-MWD goin' with too._" and the call terminated before anything else could be said.

The MGySgt exhaled and sighed as he rubbed the back of his neck and continued to watch the black screen with a slowly rotating ships emblem with the _Gallipoli_'s motto on it.

He turned around sharply, his face was flushed almost a ruddy red. "EJ! You finished yet?"

At that exact moment, there was a successful chirp from the engineer, quickly followed by an audible _pop_, then a buzzing noise of _vymmmm_ as the spartan's shields came back online. The outer skin of his armour shimmered briefly with a golden glimmer.

The engineer replaced the reactor housing back with little effort and released its hold on the spartan's back before floating away to do something else, doing so without making another noise.

"What's going on, sir?" Lorenski asked dropping his arms to the side.

"Slip-jump into atmosphere and you're getting armed up, heavy loadouts," he looked past both spartans, "You two are gearing up with them as well."

The two sangheili acknowledged the master gunny with a simple nod.

"Slip-jump into Atmo," Taylor wasn't exactly surprised but she still showed it. "Huh, not unheard of but a risky move. You know where we're going to come out at?"

"Above some gorge and into some strange weather at the same time. Not too close to the disturbances and yet not too far, the reasons are in the briefing I'm transmitting to all of you, so you know what's going on better than I ever could tell you," he rattled off, now in a calmed state and rather bored like as he inputted in a code into a nearby wall keypad.

"Seventy-Fourth K-9 Military Working Dog Unit. Interesting," Taylor noted as she read the information she brought up on her internal helmet display, "And we've got Nipper, even better."

A series of clunks reverberated throughout the room as every weapon locker unlocked and opened wide, exposing every weapon known from the UNSC to Combined Sangheili Empire, there was even three lockers solely filled with Forerunner promethean weapon tech.

"What are those?" 'Nraham asked, pointing up to a certain ceiling rack with piqued interest, all the while taking a Type-51 Carbine and a few cylindrical magazines, a plasma pistol, and then acquiring a UNSC ARC-920 railgun.

"Those?" the MGySgt replied in distaste after handing 'Doravoai a Type-58 Plasma Caster before he came over. He looked up at the three long silver sniper like rifles and four shorter ones with disdain.

"Those things are supposed to be the cream of the crop in high tech weaponry between both our species," he reached up and took down one of the shorter silver rifles for 'Nraham to examine more closely. "Supposed to be self-sufficient, so no need for magazines to reload, all powered by energy routed from a spartan's or sangheili's armour power cell. But as you can basically tell by my tone of voice, they're no more than worthless malfunctioning pieces of junk, well they are until I try to fix the stupid firing mechanisms in the flimsy things."

Spartan Lorenski grunted as he attached an M6 Spartan Laser to his back clamps before taking out a few magazines for a suppressed version of the BR85HB battle rifle and a regular M6H2 magnum. Taylor did the same for the heavy, sidearm, and primary weapon, only she replaced her flashlight on the bottom rail her battle rifle to an

M301 grenade launcher.

The AI of the frigate came in over the PA system, "**_Attention all hands, coordinated Micro-jump commencing in three... two... one..._**"

The Stalwart frigate surged forwards, as if it had just been shunted in the rear by a dozen freight MagLevs all at once.

"Alright people, gather round and listen up!" Taylor addressed loudly to the two sangheili and spartan as she then strode over to a inactive holo-table, "As to the briefing you have received I will go over it once with you. As you know all of us will be working together on this, teammates look after each other. No going lone wolf shit."

Taylor palmed the holo-table's controls. "There are energy spikes correlating to a dark zone generator pylon somewhere in the vicinity up on this mountain range near the most strongest of interferences, there is also a spire over the other side of said range."

The holo-table activated, displaying the mission objectives and data. Including a very low resolution scan of the terrain.

"At eighteen hundred hours we are to be deployed to our objectives by pelican dropship. In addition to that, we'll be given three F-99 drones for escort to the first objective before they split off to commence proper terrain scanning the prowler couldn't manage with theirs. Now, our goal with the first objective is to identify and locate it, then prep it for demolition so we can have relative clean comms. After the pylon is dealt with, we're to go on a hiking trip to get recon data on that spire for an infiltration and information mission for later. So, Lorenski," Taylor questioned, turning her gaze over to him. "As for your long serving experience and training tutelage for others in controlled demolition, have you got a charge for the dark zone?"

He nodded, "Yep," and half turning to her request, revealing a single thirty by thirty centimetres of black and green square shaped M169 Det-charge with a specialised det-link, attached securely above his left hip. "It's remote or manual triggered • whichever is preferred, also brought enough C-7 as an alternative if it is the older type of a darkzone generator."

"Good..."

There was a loud bark from a dog causing everyone to turn their heads in the direction of the door, they all saw a female marine with a black and tan kelpie on a long leash confidently strode into the armoury bay.

"K-9 Nipper and his handler Kirsten Viago, reporting in for assignment." she said standing ramrod straight and quickly saluting, more specifically directed over at Taylor. The dog, Nipper, sat next to Viago patiently as he had always trained to do and barked once, his tail wagging, indicating he was ready to get to work too.

"At ease marine and welcome to the team Viago, and you too Nipper," Taylor said warmly. "Glad to have both your unique skill sets. I'll brief you on what is going to go down while you gear up, as we'll be

leaving once this frigate emerges."

"Well, that sure sounds like fun, don't it mate?" she said in return, bending down to scratch behind the back of both of Nippers' ears. The tail wagging intensified and he went to lick her face in appreciation.

* * *

><p>Canterlot, Celestia's bedchambers, Tuesday, 5:50 pm
according to her bedside table clock.
**

It was quiet enough that the sole clopping hoof steps of one pony echoed in the room as Princess Celestia paced slowly around her chambers, her horn encased in a golden glow, and a lengthy written scroll she had yet to finish off before her eyes.

She had read it twice aloud through already, and was on the third read through making sure she wasn't over extending her condolences on the new princess alicorn. She was family after all now and after what has happened recently, Celestia had been taking things slow with her.

She took a quill from off a nearby table and dabbed the tip into a hovering inkwell before moving it towards the scroll.

_â€| I hope this is what you are looking for. Be strong in heart
Twilight, just like your brother always had been._

â€" Celestia.

It was never easy writing that and what she finished on the scroll as she scanned over each word before rolling up it up and sending it with a burst of a spell with a greenish hue. The tragic loss at sea that occurred two days ago had hit all of them very hard and it still has.

It was one thing dealing with such loss of a family member, that much she knew very very personally but to deal with this loss that the two that was lost was her adoptive niece Princess Cadance and Princess Twilight Sparkle's brother Shining Armour along with everypony aboard was gone forever, never to see their warm smiles or speak their caring thoughts, was truly a long lasting, painful taxing testament on the very heart and soul.

Celestia tried not to sigh in despair as she walked out onto her balcony to raise the moon for her sister tonight. Although it wasn't her job anymore of raising it, Luna really needed the rest as she and herself have been plagued by strange vision like dreams that always happened to end every time in a pine forest and a cold clingy feeling of dread and loss that clung to their minds long after they awoke.

Gazing far out to the west, Celestia could see that a large thunderstorm had been gathered for tonight and was beginning to roll in. As if we ever did need it tonight.

As the moon rose up slowly from the horizon, Celestia thought about the turn of events that lead up to what happened in court today. Ever since the liner ENMS New Harmony up and disappeared without a single

trace apart from an SOS from its crossing roughly in the middle of the Sunset Ocean, a great amount of bad luck seemed to have descend and smothered itself all across Equestria.

Apart from the odd report of strange blue, green and pink lights seen in the sky at night to simple everyday spells suddenly going haywire, the most of what was covered in the day court today was that there has been a sudden influx of pony disappearances over the past couple of days, many without explanation. Occurring from farming communities to small towns, even some have occurred on the outskirts of major cities, which also included Canterlot.

Two particular reports came immediately to mind from the meeting with the council that about a third of both Appleloosa and Dodge Junction's population had just vanished without a trace in one single night.

Even though there wasn't much evidence in support, many ponies still had pinned the blame on the sudden disappearances as the result of poorly reported changeling activity around those areas, but for both population's not to hear or witness one bit of the intrusion was very unsettling.

Very unsettling indeed.

Which made Celestia wonder to herself aloud. "Was this really the fault of changelings or something more?"

There was a ruffling of wings and Celestia felt something land on her back and give out a lengthy squawk of appreciation. She turned to see her pet phoenix with a happy grin on its beak. "Yes, it has been indeed a long day, Philomena. Thank you."

The phoenix sensing that her master was feeling down, she shuffled up towards Celestia's face and nuzzled her beak against the alicorn's ear. Celestia's mood of woe and despair was lifted, replaced by the warm sensation of belonging and comfort in her heart and a smile upon her lips.

The moment was interrupted by a roll of thunder accompanied by a trio of lightning flashes off to the west. It was going to be one rough long night tonight.

* * *

><p>UNSC Gallipoli, Hangar 2.**

Everyone but Taylor took a seat as they boarded the pelican, she instead stayed standing by the ramp. "I have a question, Xavier."

The _Gallipoli_'s XO, for reasons unknown had come to see them off, took note of the use of first names and responded in kind, "What is it, Maria?"

"If by the slimmest chance the interference encountered from the failed attempts of the scanning of the planet is caused and somehow belongs to an undiscovered civilization, what are our orders for proceeding to such an encounter?"

Xavier's features hardened to a stern look as he looked at her unbelievably like she had suddenly become highly radioactive, "I don't know how or where that question of an thought you just asked came from, but to your answer, there are still protocols in place for just such an event. If you want to know about such, it should be under contact protocols in the list of engagements." he scratched the stubble on his chin, "Why? Have you seen something in the recovered data that correlates to your question that we might've have skimmed over?"

Taylor shook her head, "No sir, just a gut feeling. A sixth sense if you will."

Just by the tense pause that followed, she could feel that Xavier was mulling this over in his mind for a moment, "Well, I don't care to know why I'm even agreeing to your gut feeling, but lets hope if you are right about it and you ever do bump into any of the sort, they're more of the friendly kind. We've had more than enough first contacts gone awry of our history as humanity as it is."

"Sir, hypothetical question on that," Taylor said as Xavier turned around to leave.

"Yes?" Xavier said with a sigh, not bothering to look over his shoulder, quite disinterested now.

"If such intelligent life forms do exist, what of the Remnant presence in the area? That is if they haven't beenâ€ well exposed to the eyes of the supposed hypothetical others?"

Xavier shrugged, sighing and began to walk away, "A gorge to be spanned, spartan. It's a bridge to be forged if we ever-" the pelican's door ramp sealed closed, shutting out the rest of his words.

The engines ramped up and the pelican dropship thundered out of the hangar as the frigate exited its jump and flew straight into the twilight, the transition between day and night with the three escort F-99 UCAVs in tow.

* * *

><p>Instead of the vision ending like had did every other time as she started to squeeze past her sister's large frame and another pony, the view shifted and Luna had suddenly felt very small as the sight shifted into a grey interior with four very large blurry figures sitting across from her and accompanied by a strange never-ending whirr of a rumbling sound.<p>

Luna had the sudden urge to speak and when she did, instead of words, she barked loudly thrice, exactly like a dog would do. What is this? She turned her gaze down at the floor and saw that her hooves had changed into padded paws of a glossy black dog.

Of what breed? And was she even female? She had no clue, not without a mirror or something with a reflective surface. Her thoughts were interrupted by a coughing mix laugh of sounds and gruff garbled voices.

'_ey, wh-s -ng -ith h-_'

'__st -cit-d -or -rk t-ts -ll, a-n't -hat rig-__'

Luna turned her head to the right to see where the closer noise was coming from. Sitting there she saw another burred figure, this one a little smaller, and it was reaching over to her.

Wincing for reason, Luna felt something begin to stroke her head softly and then move on to scratch behind her ear affectionately. She couldn't help herself â€" well, rather the dog couldn't since she was the one looking through the eyes of â€" jaw from opening and allowing the long tongue from rolling out to the side.

The view moved as the dog stood, and the cruel irritating, yet satisfying tingling sensation went down her back as the blurred figure moved its claw to start scratching up and down along the spine.

The urge of howling out stayed put thankfully, the panting and the thudding of the tail on the other hoof however didn't let up.

* * *

><p>Nightfall, edge of a large forest, world's surface.

Even with the sounds of growling warthogs driven my combat engineers with trailers full of equipment and even a Special Purpose-42 MBT otherwise known as a Cobra slowly rumbling in behind them, all it took was the heavy mechanical stomping sounds of two Mark IX Mantises walking down the ramp of the hovering frigate to really drown out half of a helmetless helljumper's rant while he walked out with another in tow into the dusk.

"â€| It really sucks, you of course know that of all people, don't you Hark? It's been like that for three months straight. Doesn't it ever change?" A guy by the name of Reilly with brown curly hair and a ruddy complexion, whinged as he walked out into the drizzle drenched sunrise to join up with the rest of the squad, all clustered in a tight group with their helmets also off.

"To be honest, Pokey," Jason said stopping with Reilly with the rest of the squad they belonged to, "Once the Arbiter is shot in the face by a flood infected Jul 'Mdam and the eventual climax of the Final Fantasy franchise as well as the ultimate heat death of the universe, Jinjy will get off his lazy ass and change the quote of the day on the Gallipoli's newsboard." he took out a pack of smokes from his combat webbing chest pocket and removed one of the tightly rolled sticks with his teeth.

He offered the opened packet over to the other five drop shock troopers. Violet refused politely with a wave as did Nathan, but Reilly, Chris, and Tanner didn't. Tanner stuck hers behind the ear and popped out her MA5D mag to check it over for a seventh time â€• and many people say she is the less jumpy one before any mission.

Jason put the packet back and replaced the cancer stick in-between his lips, "But I digress for everything I just said, as it'll probably only happen and I mean it, no matter how, it will only be

when we come face to face with four legged intelligent ponies, in relative harmony with others, capable of understanding us, their multi-hued colour chart coats shining in the light of the sun and moon, all the while the sprouting of their angelic avian genes along with the blissful magic of friendship across the universe."

Everyone was silent for a few as they stared at Jason before they were all overcome by the hard to control giggle fits at the outlandish comment.

Still laughing and clutching his sides, Nathan jerked a thumb mockingly over at Reilly. "Wow dude, and here I thought Pokey came up with the best fucked up predictions!"

"Hey!" Reilly, feeling insulted, jabbed a finger in at Nathan's chest. "It wasn't MY fault that '_dear squad us_' came across records regardingâ€| ahem, '_Ursus sapiens_'."

"Wise bears..." Chris muttered, translating the science-y words for the normal people while he lit the end of his up with an UNSCMC flick lighter.

Reilly turned his attention from Nathan and shot an irked look over at Violet, who was failing to do her damned best to suppress herself from sniggering from recalling the event.

"Ha, yeah, well I try," Jason continued on shamelessly with a shrug. "So, with that in mind, I'm going to get a nicotine hit, keeping all my wits about me, and when we're done from getting some, I'm gonna drink a pint from this here flask before heading for the head."

Reilly, now having stopped giving Violet the eye, examined his unlit cigarette making sure it wasn't getting as damp as he wanted it to have liked to, "So... what it is, that as for all of eternity, the quote on the board will always remain to be," he cleared his throat noisily. "Hell hath no fury like a Sangheili's mate scorned?"

Jason struck a 'strike-anywhere' match on Tanner's left forearm armour plate and brought the licking yellow flame to the end of his cigarette then over to Reilly's before it was extinguished in the rain drizzle, "Yep, only this time it won't be an active gravity-hammer that's thrown through the barracks window of the result."

The helljumpers grinned, chuckling lightly for another round as the three of them exhaled the second hand smoke. After a minute the dull distant rumbling whines of a pelican and UCAV F-99 Wombat drones added a new layer of sound to the backdrop of an approaching night lightning storm. There was a sudden snap of a branch as their squad leader â€" First Lieutenant Ricky Lorraine â€" walked out through the low mist from discussing the plan up with the his equal of the other squad.

"Alright ladies, put 'em out. Time to hoof it and get paid," he said sternly and waved out south east-ish. "There's a ruin like structure somewhere over there that Call Me Maybe spotted visually before she went out south west up to the dense cloud layer and the heads want us to check it, then clear it out."

"So why have we got Mantises as support? I feel a bit exposed with them stompin' around in the dark," Violet grumbled.

"Aw come on, Vi," Tanner teased half-heartedly. "You want the demons and special alligators to turn tail and act as our support instead?"

As a response, Violet unlimbered her Sniper Rifle System 99-Series 5 Anti-Materiel and adjusted the custom Oracle sights of it at a nearby warped tree trunk. "And miss the fun of plastering some covies that are sure to be there through the brain pan? Nuh-uh!"

Tanner punched Violet lightly on the shoulder, "That's right, go girl power!"

Violet lowered the rifle to rest and shied away so that no one else could see her cheeks go rosy red in embarrassment. "Aw shucks girl, you always did know to play me right."

Lorraine looked over to Hark, Reilly and Chris. "Take your last, I have a feeling it's a goin' to be a long one for awhile."

The three helljumpers took the final drag before they grinded the barely smoked sticks into the soil under the heel of their boots. "All done now, Lt."

Lorraine motioned with his head into the confines of the forest, "Right, lets go."

To the rhythmic clicks of safeties flicking off, everyone's visor polarized on the lieutenant's words and began moving for the edge of the tangle of forest, their silenced SMGs and assault rifles pointed roughly ahead of them.

With the other squad of shock troopers already pushing through the mossy and lichen covered trees a ways out ahead, the only other sound's of the early night was the ever encroaching storm, the twin thudding mechanical thuds accompanied by the odd crack of the Mantises as they pushed through the brush when there wasn't a cleaner path.

* * *

><p>It still felt like a dream that was for sure but it still looked like a vision while the tall blurred shapes before Luna ambled about to and fro and she felt compelled to move herself to get closer, but before she could, Luna was interrupted by something immensely strong that seized her by neck, pulling her away from what she could see before whatever it was then lifted her clean off the ground.<p>

Turning her head up and around in the direction of what held her aloft, Luna could see the blurred form of her attacker quickly formed into a less than blurred focus, and what it was scared her more than Tantabus ever had did to her.

The daunting bipedal black monster sneered louder, harsher than the other times she had heard before in her ears and tightened its grip around her neck. Luna found herself starting to lose focus, struggling to barely breathe in its grasp.

As her vision started to go dark at the edges, Luna lashed out at the monster with her hind legs and then with a blast from her horn immediately after causing it to let go in a howling angered roars. She didn't want to even care to know if that solved the problem as she just turned tail and flew away fast, and fly fast she did, as fast as her wings could beat to keep her aloft so she could to get away.

She weaved too and thro through around offending trees in her path of the forest, but still the shadowy figure that grabbed her not a moment ago came closer, its guttural growls and mocking sneers getting louder as it somehow gained ground faster on her than she could fly.

She tried flying above the forest but there was something holding her back, something was keeping her from not ascending no more than about a meter or two above the rushing ground that streaked below.

Angered and bitter words of a foreign language she could not understand was bellowed directly into her ears, 'Domo'Ingannon! Karumshurah ree chitakorru!' and suddenly she found herself back in the grasp of the black monster and was treated to a blue glowing object held in claw that was then plunged straight through her chest.

Princess Luna screamed like she never had before.

The writhing agony Luna was feeling wasn't like anything she had ever experienced before. The closest thing the searing burning pain could've only been described as she had been forced to drink the lava out of an active volcano.

The experience to endure it any further was too much for Princess Luna's mind and the pure torment ejected her from the dream. Luna's eyes flew open as she bolted upright in her bed, rivers of perspiration streaming all over her and the crisp and clean bed sheets she was once under were now wrapped tightly around her body, the tightest of which was wrung around her neck as she continued to scream at the top of her lungs.

__**CRASH!**__

The double doors to her bedchambers burst wide open almost off their hinges. Standing in the middle of them revealed a very worried Princess Celestia who was accompanied by five Royal Guards of both day and night. Their expressions were stern looking as always but their body language told otherwise.

"Lula! Are you okay?"

Luna was far from okay. She was still trembling and sweating profusely from the experience of the last vision like dream whilst trying to unwrap herself from the tanglement of tight bed sheets around her body.

The guards stayed outside of the room but blocked any entry as Celestia moved to her distraught trembling sister's side on the bed and wrapped a white feathery wing around her, in an attempt to calm the shaking alicorn princess. It worked, the shaking eased to nothing

and the sweating stopped.

Celestia whispered with concern into Luna's ear, "What happened?"

When the midnight alicorn didn't reply, Celestia asked again, providing the answer to Luna's terror vision. "It was the same one, wasn't it?"

Luna wiped a tear that had formed again from her eye with the tip of one of her wings and looked back into her sisters. "Yes it was Tia, but this time, this time the ending changed and it went on far longer than it had previously."

Celestia's features hardened as she frowned in concern. "It was different? Different how?"

Luna didn't hesitate to launch into the retelling of the strange vision events for Celestia of what happened after she had tried to pushed past her in the pine forest.

* * *

><p>Somewhere...

A silver solid door retracted in upon itself and five, four legged, shadowy figures of varying height, all with horns and wings, came out of the lengthy hall behind. Two of them split off immediately, each going their separate directions while the rest strode comfortably out into a gigantic open cavern, and then straight onto a thin partially see through silver platform that jutted over the edge without any means of support to keep it the way it is.

Two of the smaller figures, the ones with green spines down their necks and that flanked the tall middle one, looked up for guidance.

"Go," the middle one rasped, expressing little emotion.

The two that looked for guidance on what to do leaped off the platform without question and plummeted down into the cavern.

The taller one hadn't felt like this in untold millenniums, it was great to be back doing what it was originally out here to do and so it smiled in genuine glee for the briefest of moments. The tips of its fangs became exposed and glinting in the soft blue light that emanated from around the illuminated both halves of the broken cruise liner suspended in whitish blue stasis beams down far below.

3. Chapter 2: Impending Unrest

****Disclaimer:** I do not own Halo or My Little Pony. They belong to Microsoft/343 Industries and Hasbro respectfully but all original content is mine.**

****Chapter 2: Impending Unrest****

* * *

><p>Canterlot, east wing of the royal palace, Day and Night Court Meeting Assembly Hall.

Night Court.

Every second week of every month, Princess Luna truly disliked this, but it had to be done. Without it, Equestria would've broken long ago. Falling into despair and chaos all on its own without a single shred of Discord's input.

The court has been called seven times this month and with the storm raging outside, many of the few ponies who probably share Luna's point of view on certain things would think it couldn't get more boring.

And many would be rightâ€| ninety eight percent of the time. Which was exactly what was on tonight's schedule.

After discussing matters of importance that were already sorted out in the day court as well as putting out a patrol in the woods to the east near Canterlot, it came that time of having ponies come in with problems or looking for support of projects beneficial to pony-society.

Still, after all this time of her return, there had been only a few patrons that decide to show up.

The first session of three of this month's meeting she only had a pitiful dismal of two. One about an issue about land ownership and another about a community program dealing with more advanced teachings in astronomy and the leanings of the night sky.

Not that she would outwardly complain about the lack of ponies coming to her with problems or proposals. Luna had had her fair share of day court many times over in the past, and boy, did she hate that.

Nobles houses with their nag, nag, nag, holler, nag. Resulting in pounding headaches for the afternoon temporary solved by painkillers and a glass of water or an hour soaking in the pool sized bathtub with a glass of wine.

The first one of the night was a simple resolve. A misplaced decimal point in the land boundary measurements and the second she undoubtedly approved.

Luna look to her guards standing emotionless around the room, looking out for any minutest change in their demeanor. Seeing none, Luna bowed her head, her eyes flashing a glow of solid white as she delved into the dream world.

Celestia had retired to her bedchambers after the long moment of comforting the both of them in silence before a lengthy breakdown discussion of the vision like dream. Luna knew Tia wasn't asleep, the door to her sister's dreams in the dream dimension had yet to appear.

Thinking of doors to dreams, a few odd ones of peculiar make had abruptly made an appearance, and all of them were locked tight. Even her mastery of the realm couldn't open them. What else struck out at

her as odd to note about them, many, if not all, were crafted out of a dull metal grey or of a light brown stone with intricate patterns chiseled into them.

**Fwip.**

Hmm?

Luna returned from the dreamworld to witness a scroll, one sealed with a blue cord and a crescent moon insignia, materialized before her and fell to ground before her hooves.

Picking it up from the floor and with a flick of magic from her horn, Princess Luna unrolled the parchment and began reading what it said.

Halfway, she growled in annoyance as she continued to read through the report.

Apparently somepony tonight had the gall to go and graffiti part of a historic railway bridge with chalk. A bridge built in dedication and remembrance to Princess Amore as it was the line that led to the Crystal Empire. And by somepony, it really meant some rebellious Gryphon had done the tagging.

It was written in their difficult to fathom writing after all.

'**206th AD was here.**'

Princess Luna rolled her eyes, groaning in a half disguised huff as she levitated a quill and ink pot next to her.

She scribbled down on the paper at the bottom with her permission and signature to proceed, rolled up the report and with a simple flick of a spell, it vanished, heading for the incident room to be processed for approval and then carried out.

"Still can't get my head around as to why they go and write their nickname into things only just to be tracked and sent to jail, just because they think it's fun," Luna muttered out. "Wouldn't you say?" turning to one of her personal Lunar counterparts; thestrals or less known as batponies, of the Royal guard standing at attention nearby.

The stallion guard turned, giving a single nod of agreement back before returning to the position as he was before.

If it was up to her and if it was before the imprisonment on the moon, she'd throw those types of rebellious people into Canterlot's dungeons. See how they'd like that compared to the comfy jail cells they're put in.

But that would go against the set laws in the Criminal Procedure Act of Equestria and most of all, her sister wouldn't like it very much. Amusing for an attempt may it be, but a definite nope.

Luna sighed as she lied down, a chin on hoof as she thought about it. Things were so simpler back then. Cause trouble, get caught, stand trial before us, into the dungeons for a day or more if proven guilty

or didn't have enough bits to pay the fine._

She stifled a yawn of boredom. _By Tia's mark, I really do miss those fugitives from justice pursuits. So much exciting than this._

There was a crash of lightning and the roll of thunder that followed rattled the windows.

She got up, stretching her back in a rhythmic of clicks and walked over to a rain streaked window. Luna held her chin up with a hoof on the sill and watched as lightning forked through the clouds while another ominous boom resounded through the night.

How I'd give a million bits right now for something like it.

* * *

><p>Cockpit of pelican G97H-TC: 'Ugly 404'.

The pelican heavy gunship/dropship burned through the night at a mere 230 feet above the deck. It was no cakewalk keeping the bird flying on course, especially during this gusty thunderstorm, and that two of the most intense interferences coming up was making navigating the hilly land ahead in the dark at this low altitude challenging than it already was.

There had also been a change of objectives in the mission plan. Instead of going for the pylon first, like what was outlined in the mission briefing, Command and Control had switched around the objectives so now that Roan team was to scout out the spire first then proceed to take out the Dark Zone generator.

In the cockpit and emanating from the tiny speakers, the twentieth and twenty-first century music mix of 'Magic Carpet Ride' was playing, fitting in quite swell with the Sangheili pilot clad in basic flight armour. It was one of his favorites of human music culture much to his human co-pilot's disapproval, to which she said that it should be playing 'Right Time Wrong Place' which was up next, taking into consideration of what the weather they were flying through had suddenly shifted to become.

"By the Gods, we're sure are going to loose some proverbial paint between these on this one." 'Relcam said to Allencourt about the interferences, ones that started appearing on either side as great smears of ever shifting clutter on the long range radar.

"At least this time they aren't some kind of triple-A or SAM sites," she remarked.

"True. Although the interferences could be a type of jamming we have yet to encounter; hiding said emplacements."

"Also true."

The Pelican gave a series of gut lurches as they flew through another pocket of turbulence. The cockpit door cycled open unveiling a grey and orange spartan and a conversation going on in the back about using a certain phrase of a derogatory word in Galactic Scrabble.

"... common useage. That's the key word here." 'Nraham's logical voice was heard saying.

"No, if it's not in the official UEG and CSE lexicons, it doesn't count!" 'Doravoai said in return.

"It doesn't have to be in the lexicons!"

"It does have to be in the lexicons! Listenâ€|"

Taylor put a hand on the back of the sangheili's seat as the pelican shuddered once more from another pocket of turbulence. "With that fantastic atmosphere back there, are you at least trying to make two seasoned spartans, SpecOps, a marine and her BBDF air sick as well?"

"I didn't think Nipper, the super sniffer bomb and seeker detection woof that led my downed ass out of the fire on Sig Four would get air sick. Oh well, wanna know how I've done it to veteran drop shock troopers?" Allencourt said jubilantly, looking over her shoulder for a moment to acknowledge the spartan before quickly returning back to flying.

"Maybe some other time, yes?"

"... touch my Split-Lip, I'll slap you Xytas." 'Nraham continued to argue.

"Hmph, promisesâ€| " 'Doravoai scoffed in return.

"Deal," Allencourt jerked a thumb over her shoulder at her sangheili pilot. "You can thank us that I've got a pilot who knows what we're in for, as you can plainly tell, I can hardly fly her level because this persistent freakin' lightning keeps threatening to wash out my NVDs."

'Relcam snorted at that as he suppressed a laugh, and chipped in with his own consideration.

"Well if it bothers you so much, why don't you switch over to thermals for the time being and I'll warn you if you're going to fly into anything taller than a tree."

It was well known throughout the task group's air wing that he was quite used to Allencourt's antics, mostly in her line of humor.

"Oh screw you, Osis. It was one time, one time!" she said, toggling half her sights over to thermals.

"On a clear moonlit night, right Liz?" Taylor deadpanned in with.

Brought up her Heads Up Display was the entire incident including the so called tree. Before departing for the hangar, Taylor had taken the time to read into both pilots' service records and their backgrounds before and in service with the UNSC/CSE.

Allencourt could only groan in exasperation as 'Relcam gave a gravelly hearty laugh with the spartan.

"How's navigation?" Taylor asked 'Relcam seriously, any traces of her laugh now absent.

"Terrible." The sangheili muttered, looking down at a holopad with a crude map of the area around them on his lap. "It's been VFR ever since we began skirting past those flux areas."

Allencourt grunted, "Yeah, you should take a look at my instruments."

Her flight instrument panel was flickering every so often with the wrong flight input orientations. The music in the cockpit changed to a song called 'Write It All Down For You' but 'Relcam quickly hit pause icon on his secondary screen.

"Other than that, how's our progress on the new route of this ballpark looking," Taylor asked, getting back on track with what she had come forward to ask.

Allencourt, now sounding quite pleasant, replied. "Well spartan, apart from the switched objectives which is no biggy. So far, so good. About an hour more on our current heading to third waypoint, then a bankâ€¦" she tapped a finger against her thankfully working analogue compass for emphasis. "Back whatchamacallit-ish up another valley for ten, and then we should be there for the sixth waypoint near the ranges, then climbing hard for the drop for the spire for the HALO. Oh and by the by, how well can you swim?"

Taylor was caught off guard for a moment, "Come again?"

For her part, Allencourt didn't say anything and instead did a little back-to-front nod to 'Relcam. He handed the datapad that was on his lap over to the spartan.

"Ah, that's no bother, really." Taylor remarked as she took and observed the data pad linked of the pelican's pulse weather radar, "Torrent rain and wind like that never disrupted anybody's op." she handed the pad back to 'Relcam when she was done downloading the information. "Especially any Remnant."

"Yeah, true," Allencourt scoffed. "Stillâ€¦ how I would really give someone a thousand cR's just to witness a jackal try to swim."

With a single snort of laughter, Taylor left, shaking her head as she returned to the troop bay. 'Relcam reached back and unpaused the music. The lyrics flowed from the playlist once more while the pelican gave a typical jolt of what was now considered by this point by both as normal typical weather for this rock in space.

* * *

><p>Ponyville. Golden Oak Library.

"Rainbow, isn't this a bitâ€¦ well, excessive?" Princess Twilight Sparkle worryingly asked with a questioning eyebrow as she jotted a few lines down onto a scroll before rolling it up with her magic.

"Whatta you mean?" Rainbow Dash said, fore legs crossed as she hovered low indoors.

**Ka-Crash!**

Twilight couldn't help but flinch as lightning cracked through the sky. Her home is protected by a magical lightning rod yes, but for such extreme weather such as this, as of late it just seemed wellâ€|overdone.

'Overcharged more like it' is what Spike had said.

"That." she indicated a hoof up. "The recent weather patterns for the past week. Are you or aren't you not the leader of Ponyville's weather team?"

"Yeah, I am to the first, but these pattern changes came from Downburst herself."

There was another crackle of lightning with the clap of thunder and this time the ground gave a jolt including Rainbow Dash.

"But I see your point." she said sheepishly. "I'll ask her sometime tomorrow morning about it."

"Thanks again, Rainbow."

"No probs."

Twilight levitated a book on '_Animals and Magical Creatures of the Everfree Vol. 6_', back to its proper spot in the this time alphabetically year of published ordered bookshelf. "How's Fluttershy coping?" she asked, back to her friend as she picked out and extracted the next volume.

"She's doing better now." Rainbow said in a less than worried tone, yet it conflicted in the way she was rubbing of her fore leg in concern when Twilight turned back around.

Fluttershy was staying the nights with Rainbow Dash for the time being until the forest had settled down and returned to its "Usual state" of former glory.

The Everfree Forest and the animals that dwell within have been acting twitchy over the course of the past two weeks. And since Fluttershy's cottage rests on the border of the forest, it came to be of great concern to their friend as there have been some abnormal events that happened when she had asked to have at least somepony staying with her for the night, all starting with Pinkie Pie and scuffling sounds on the roof in the middle of the night.

So when it rotated for Applejack's second turn for a night, AJ could've sworn that at one point, she'd seen more than a pair of glowing unblinking orange and green eyes staring directly back at her out through the kitchen door window.

'_Twas certainly no Timber Wolf's eyes I've ever seen, that's for darn sure._' AJ had quietly mentioned to Twilight and Pinkie when they came around in the morning to discuss how the night was.

And for when it was Twilight's fourth turn, when both ponies woke up in the morning, Fluttershy found a strange pair of footprint in a

bare patch of dirt in her garden, this went without saying about the guttural rasping noises that transpired during the course for the rest of that night. After that, Rainbow Dash asked Fluttershy if she wanted to stay the nights at her place for the time being, until things cooled down, so to speak.

There wasn't much of a discussion other than a straightforward answer of yes.

Twilight levitated the sketch of what looked like an eagle's footprint but far larger over for Rainbow to see after she put the next volume down on the desk.

"What are your thoughts on it?"

"My thoughts?" Rainbow doubtfully remarked as she looked at it for a scant second then back at Twilight. "You're kidding right?"

Twilight's brain whirred for a bit before it finally clicked. _Point taken._

"Erm, right."

She levitated the sketch over to Spike, who at the moment was carrying a pile of new books in his claws to be sorted out in the near future. As the piece of paper drifted in front of his face, he put the books aside and out of the way to not be a tripping hazard.

Rainbow Dash yawned, "Anyways, it's getting late and I'd better get going. See ya tomorrow Twilight."

"Bye Rainbow. Be safe, to the both of you."

Rainbow gave a wave, "You know it and the same to you." and she flew out before the door closed for home.

Everything fell quiet as Twilight returned to her search, all apart from the drumming drone of the rain against the outside of the windows.

* * *

><p>After close to forty three minutes had ticked on past. Spike walked up to a window by the front door and peered out<p>

"There he is again."

Twilight looked up from the text of the book and the next volume in the collection beside it. "Hmm?"

Spike just waved to her to come over and indicated out the window he standing near.

Twilight got up and walked over next to Spike to the window in question, and peered into the storming night outside.

Folding his wings and once again standing in the middle of the street, always on the dot of nine o'clock post meridiem just like

every other night, completely alone and tonight in the pouring rain happened to be a dark coloured stallion pegasus. One of a near black coat, amber eyes, and a grey steel blue mane with a single blue cobalt stripe running through his tail.

"Every nightâ€¦" She muttered, sighing in an exasperated tone.

Many ponies who live in or around town would call it Ponyville's luck, others would say it's a curse, a scant few say the town has a mind of its own. Whatever the answer may it be, the town has an uncanny charm to it that attracted even the oddest of ponies that had or still have great trouble in their past to sort out at any given time and just one of those ponies, the one standing outside in the rain happened to be just one of those.

The pony in question was a pegasus stallion by the strange name of Eclipse Shadow.

A total enigma, even for a pony living near Ponyville, come day and night.

The pony was a mystery to be still fully uncovered for Twilight and her friends, ever since the day when he turned up in Ponyville out of the blue about a month ago.

This wasn't because he was a pegasus and he had a habit of using "we" in place of "I" randomly when referring to himself, kinda much like princess Luna did when she returned from being _cured _by the Elements of Harmony and the fact that many things he said the longer the conversation with him went didn't exactly make much sense, but because he knew far more than anypony and had a memory like an encyclopedia mixed in with a thesaurus.

To say he even could potentially meet Twilight's level in a knowledge duel and bypass it without flinching was an understatement. Twilight had a gut feeling that the pegasus knew more than he was letting on. She had a sneaking suspicion of this during after a conversation with him on the monday of this week about how to spot a changeling based solely on behaviour patterns.

In all honestly after that conversation, Twilight had gone and searched for that information for herself. In the end, it boiled down to the point that she had found that there was indeed a certain trove of information on spotting changeling behaviour patterns had existed, but was destroyed in the resulting scuffle between princess Celestia as she evaded before she fought and banished her sister more than a thousand years ago.

In all reasoning after that, Twilight then believed that Shadow was a changeling in pony disguise if he was to know that. So, when Twilight met him the next day for the continuation of the talk, she discreetly performed a passive spell; a type of magic that allowed only the caster to see a different colour aura around the target.

Twilight had been learning this old spell in the past with the help of Cadance and her BBBFF since the aftermath of the unsuccessful changeling invasion of Canterlot royal wedding.

The indicating colours of the magical spell were simply typical and easy to identify. Green: clean. Deep red with various tone stages of

red intensity: warning and threat level indication. Blue mixed with white: indecisive, try again. However, the colours of purple and orange was a complete mystery, she had no idea what they meant and neither did the book detailing about the magic list anything about it. To which is what exactly happened to Shadow when she used it on him during their talk. The aura had gone to blue first then quickly switching to orange before she could get the chance to recast the spell, then finally turning to purple and stayed that way.

That and when he arrived he didn't even trigger off Pinkie Pie's 'Welcome to Ponyville' routine, even when the two had bumped into each other and he mentioned he was new and staying in town.

_Might as wellâ€¦ _

Twilight opened the top half of her door. "Shadow? What are you doing out there? Why don't you come inside and out of the rain."

There was about a five second delay before he responded whilst he craned his neck up, like he only now just realised it was indeed raining. And what he said in return confirmed just that assumption.

"So it is." he turned his attention back to Twilight. "But I'm quite okay as I am princess Twilight Sparkle, there is no need for your concerned worry."

The alicorn and the drake watched him turn to leave when something made him pause mid stride.

Shadow wasn't that pony that was handsome or well kept, nor was he ugly and should be steered clear of, and nor was he the type of pony that was interesting or annoying. He was just one of those types ponies with that certain _aura_ about them, an aura that when you'd first met with one, you'd ignored most of what just transpired or forgot about them entirely afterwards.

This probably explained the whole strange event that played out when Rainbow asked Pinkie about Eclipse Shadow right a few minutes after their little bump in, about how she missed him being a new addition and all to which Pinkie then came forward with; '_What pony?_'

"Oh, taking in consideration that I am here, there is one thing we wish to ask of you."

Twilight had a gnawing feeling in her gut that he knew something important that she didn't know, again.

"Yes, what is it?" Twilight asked, trying not to outwardly appear so flustered about it.

"We had heard through I that you found a peculiar footprint in a garden not a few days ago. Is it possible that we may see your sketch?"

Twilight and Spike turned to look at each other.

First off; _that was bound to happen eventually, but with him finding out first and so quickly? _And second; _how did he know it was a drawing and not a cast?_

All of them; herself, Spike, Applejack, Fluttershy, Pinkie Pie, Rarity, and Rainbow Dash had all been very cautiously discreet with the finding of the prints after Applejack erased them immediately when Spike finished compiling the sketch. No pony else knew; they shouldn't know. And yet for the time being, not even princess Celestia or Luna knew.

So, that begged the question. How did he find out?

Thinking quickly as to whether or not to tell or lie, Twilight made up her mind and she looked at Spike. The look he gave told Twilight he had come to the same conclusion.

"Come in out of the rain and I'll show it to you."

He nodded, "Thank you, princess Twilight Sparkle." and walked through the rain for the half open door.

Twilight went to open the other part of the door. "Spike, can you get a towel for Shadow to dry himself off."

"You got it. I'll be back in a tick, Twi." he said and dashed off.

Twilight turned back to Shadow now standing in front of her.

"As I mentioned back then, there is no need to for you to call me princess while I'm in Ponyville, or bow even, it just feels tooâ€| well, out of place."

"And as long as I see you as an alicorn, princess Twilight Sparkle." he said doing a little groveling bow much to her annoyance of what she just said. "I will not deviate from the set rules established by those in the past long before I."

Spike came back as Shadow walked inside and politely handed him the towel.

Huh, what the?

As Spike offered Shadow the towel to dry off, he noticed the black pegasus was already bone dry; coat, wings, everything. In fact, the pegasus looked as if he hadn't been in the rain at all.

Shadow took the towel with a wing, patted his face before giving the scarcely damp towel back to Spike.

"Thank you, little one."

Sigh, I knew it. Spike said to himself internally.

When the drake had met Shadow for the first time, the pegasus knew everything common about him right off the bat. So right then and here, Spike at least expected his name or drake or even dragon for that matter, but for Shadow to fall back on the name of _little one_?

Looking back to the pegasus, Spike saw that Shadow was giving him a disguised sly grin only he could see.

Oh, that- he did that on purpose, didn't he? _What a-__

Spike didn't speak his mind as he took the towel back, but instead he rolled his eyes in grief and spun on his heel to return to the bathroom where he got it.

Now with Shadow inside and in the warmer glow of light, Twilight could now was able to get a better detailed look at him. In the month to know the pegasus somewhat, he had the odd habit of sitting or standing in the darkest possible spot.

His coat was definitely charcoal black but his mane wasn't as a white silver like she thought but more of a two toned silver hue, part blue the other a light shade of grey, and being this close she was able to see his cutie mark more clearly and cleanly.

It was a quite curious for a cutie mark as she hadn't seen anything quite like it. In fact, in all her years studying Twilight didn't think anypony had a similar mark in history that came anywhere near it.

The mark consisted of four separate grey coloured fractured circle like rings. Each fractured ring was spaced out inside of each other and each with at least a sizable gap at some point. It appeared as if it was some kind of puzzle or maze, like somepony had to turn the broken rings for their gaps to line up just right in order to solve it.

Twilight calmly motioned him to come over to the desk she was working at and pointed with a hoof at the sketch.

"This is the print that was found in the garden."

Shadow had barely glanced at it and yet Twilight could see he already had something of an answer on the tip of his tongue as his ears folded back.

"_Perosus latrunculus_." he said, a hint of malice escaping from his growl.

Twilight saw his dull amber eyes give a flicker to the colour of green and red with a hint of purple briefly for a second before returning to normal. That was new seeing that about him and very disturbing.

"You know what it is?"

"Yes, it's my taskâ€¦ but you already knew that." Shadow said looking up and locking his cold hard gaze with her warm ones before breaking contact with a shake of his head. "And we've wished they weren't to be this far over here but they are now, which puts matters we have of others we had prepared long ago into greater turmoil." he shivered, ruffling his wings as he did so.

Whether it was involuntary or on purpose, Twilight couldn't be sure but what she could be sure of is that when he did, the temperature in the room around him seemed to drop by a few degrees and the sense of a heavy burden of dread weigh down heavily on her consciousness.

"Is that the reason behind why it's so bad about this print." Spike asked.

"Well, it depends really." Shadow said with a nervous shrug.

"Depends on what exactly?" Spike pressed.

Shadow pointed the tip of his left wing at the drake. "And that there, Spike, is the correct answer," he began to tremble, "That is wherein lies the complication. Even I don't know for certain anymore to relay the info; there is nothing to gain anymore by being near the capital or the forest for that matter, they made sure of that,"

Twilight could see that Shadow was becoming more distressed the longer this current line of questioning went on, and after what she had bore witness in his eyes after the initial outburst revealed that he had been in contact with a great amount of dark magic at some point of his life, she didn't want him to unknowingly unleash it, not in here.

"But unlessâ€¦ unless if theyâ€¦ arrghâ€¦" he continued, rubbing his temples with his wings in frustration while beginning to pace back and forth in trepidation.

Exposure to high concentrations of dark magic, like the way she saw in his eyes, could affect anypony and there were dire consequences because of it when the pony in question affected was not a unicorn or alicorn for that matter.

Twilight coughed, "Back to this," directing the distraught Shadow from his pacing back to the print. "You said you know what the creature this belongs too."

"Hmm? Oh yes, that." Shadow said, ears flicking back up and his manner somewhat calming down from what he was acting like earlier. "This creature, the one you've been scouring many books for, the one this print belongs to," he tapped the print with the tip of his wing before folding it back to his side. "It will not exist in any volume collection of books that you have here or have studied elsewhere that I have on record. This creature that made it, it is a subspecies belonging to saurian like birds of the Perosus Latrunculus kind."

Twilight waited for him to elaborate.

"A T'vaoan." Shadow said grimly as deep rolls of thunder rumbled through the storming night.

To Twilight's ears, he said the name with a quick and sharp "T" to begin with then "vow" for vao then "en" for the end. When it came out from his mouth a second time when she asked for it again, it rolled off his tongue so smoothly like touching silk, so when she tried speaking it for the first time, it sounded more like a swing and a miss.

"And theseâ€¦ Teh-viv-an? T'vow-en? â€¦ T'vaoan." Twilight said looking to Shadow for clarification if she pronounced it correctly.

He said the third one was correct. She hopped a little with glee that she got it.

"These T'vaoan avian like creatures, do they reside deep within the Everfree Forest?" Twilight inquired, jotting down the notes down onto a scroll. She'd make note to search what the first name, _Perosus latrunculus_, he gave the print means for another time.

"No. Never. They are also not native to Equestria, the Gryphon Empire, or Zebraconia Isles. Although, if you are truly feeling adventurous and you, princess Twilight Sparkle, would want to go out searching for one specifically, many can be found in abundance in the Y'Deio province."

"The Y'Deio province?" Twilight questioned; that word was quite easy to pronounce than she thought it was, putting away one the books she had got out to find what the print matched to while Spike put away the rest. "Where's that? Never heard of it."

"No pony of this cycle would know; apart from four, that's not including myself and three others. Lynthia and her sister would probably stick me to the ceiling again if they found out that I had said that." he stated, looking quite appeased with his answer while rubbing the tip of a wing against his chin. "Not that I overly enjoyed the time stuck hanging upside down in the sanctuary archives for the billionth time with a custodian explaining about her previous duties over to me, it was still enlightening until a certain annoyance showed up."

Shadow caught Spike just staring at him, jaw slightly agape and a confused expression of the eyebrows. "What? I'm still quite convinced that it was her idea of discipline and not his the last time aroun-"

"This cycle? Sanctuary archives?" Twilight Sparkle inquired quite intrigued, interrupting the charcoal pegasus.

She had stopped writing what she heard as her eyes picked up on what she just wrote. She was looking up from the parchment over to Shadow with that gaze of wanting to know more.

Shadow's calm yet odd perplexing demeanor he had about him shifted back to that of absolute trepidation and his amber pupils shrank to the size of pinpricks as he stared dead ahead. His body looked as if it was wound so tight that if someone so much as breathed on him, it would set him off.

"By Tau-â€¦ Iâ€¦ Iâ€¦ ahhhâ€¦ Iâ€¦ " Shadow stammered out trying to find words to explain. He swallowed hard enough for both alicorn and drake to hear before abruptly uttering "Bye!"

As fast as a cragadile's jaws snapping shut, he flung open the door with a *_wham*_ and flew headlong right into the now hammering rain of the night. Never pausing to spare a second thought on that he just did.

Spike could only stare at the empty spot where Shadow was standing just a moment ago while where as Twilight could only think of what she could see about his tail when he turned and fled, to make sure it

wasn't just her eyes playing tricks on her.

Twilight could've sworn that the stripe was cobalt blue when he came in and not shifted to a pale yellow as he took off out the door.

* * *

><p>Troop hold of G97H-TC 'Ugly 404'.

"... _UCAV seven five, seven six, redirected to push north east-
crrrk_kk_"

Lorenski switched from the pelican's powerful comms tuned into C&C to squad comms as the dropship lurched steeply upwards, clawing for altitude.

Word in from C&C on the ground is that the two ODST squads with the two mantises lending support had uncovered a pair of well concealed Type-38 Tyrant anti-aircraft cannon emplacements in an area closeby to the ruins that they were sent to recon by what _Call Me Maybe_ spotted. In return, they had asked for backup and they got their wish, a platoon's worth of force recon marines supported by M12 warthog LRVs and two Grizzly Main Battle Tanks provided courteously by the destroyer UNSC _Halberd_-MkII _Arkhangelsk_.

He checked over Viago once more, pulling hard at the straps and belts of the packs strapped to her legs. The special harness of her chest, the buckles keeping a disk-like ARGUS-type surveillance drone snugly in place, and especially the black backpack.

The backpack was the Falcon Wing aerial decent unit; a parachute, and Lorenski was making absolutely sure it was tight and not going to fall off when they eventually jumped out the back of the perfectly good pelican.

"All set." Lorenski said, giving her a thumbs up.

"Great. How 'bout you buddy? You good?" Viago asked, her voice coming over the squad comms, a high altitude breathing mask over her mouth. She scratched something that was strapped snug and securely long across just below her chest.

Nipper's tail wagged enthusiastically in response as Viago scratched him behind the ears. It never was a dull moment with her buddy being around. He couldn't bark because he also had a special mask/muzzle on, not just for easier breathing when they dropped from this high altitude, but for his protection of his muzzle when they jumped. Viago didn't want nipper to break his jaw if they came in awkwardly. It'll would be removed when they landed dirt side.

A klaxon went off twice while a call from 'Relcam came in over the bay intercom. "_One minuteâ€¦| _"

Taylor finished checking over herself and called over the radio as the troop bay was enveloped in a red wash, "Right. Sound off, comm check,"

One by one in no particular order, the members of Fireteam Roan came in crisply over squad comms.

"Specialist 'Nraham, Roan three. Link secure."

"Spartan Lorenski, Roan four. Link is good and loud."

"Specialist 'Doravoai, Roan two. In clean and clear."

"Roan five, handler Viago and MWD Nipper. All good and set." she said, giving a thumbs up to everyone.

"Spartan Taylor, Roan lead. Comms check out green and good." Taylor said, turning to look over her shoulder and she hit the red ramp door button. The indicator light underneath it turned green and the ramp door rumbled open with a reverberating thrum.

The roaring wind from the outside rushed in along with the high pitched whine of the pelican's engines. Outside beyond and below was an foreboding active thunderstorm obscuring the ground far underneath. The storm stretched far as the eye could see, complete with the ominous white blue flashes of lightning.

Without hesitation, 'Doravoai dived out of the pelican headfirst for the storm below with Taylor following. Immediately up next was a tandem Viago with Nipper, and finally Lorenski and 'Nraham bringing up the rear last.

With the drone of the pelican's engines gone, the only things fireteam Roan heard was the sound of the wind rushing past their body, their steady breathing in their heads as they fell towards the violent cloud layer and finally the pelting rain, the crash of thunder and lightning forking around them as they fell through the top layer.

* * *

><p>Occurring roughly around the same time as Roan jumped...

Hell.

That is what this had become.

A complete and utter hell, and completely normal circumstances to the remaining orbital drop shock troopers, seasoned marines and CSE elites attached.

Burnt out husks of M12 LRV Warthogs, Type-32 ghosts, and the odd appearance of an Type-29 Shadow or two littered the area around the castle while the destroyed Type-38 Tyrants continued to burn like Norse funeral pyres; but all these paled in comparison of what was already unfolding with the mayhem going around in the area.

The devil's hell they were in, kicked off an hour ago, after the power cores in the Tyrants went critical and that the rain began to piss down they began pulling back to the ruins, a remnant elite decloaked after stepping out from behind a tree, grabbing ODST Team One leader by the throat and uttering '_Domo'Ingannon! Karumshurah ree chitakorru!_' right into her face before plunging its sword through her chest. The stealth elite was greeted with no remorse as a wall of bullets brought it down in a nanosecond.

Now at present, shadows were cast for brief seconds in the darkness of the outlines of troopers and marines fighting their best, moving from cover to cover and taking cover behind the crumbling high stone walls and falling to ruin ruins of the ruined castle against entrenched covenant that suddenly revealed themselves.

The calm and collected shouting over the comm was barely disconcertable due to the constant explosions and weapon fire ringing in his ears.

**Brraaapp. Brraaapp. Brraaapp. **

"â€| _call inâ€| is seven strongâ€|_"

It wasn't muted noise, it was blaring loud as hell, like pressing your ear up to an active fire alarm. The chattering snapping of gunfire, the whine of whistling zapping plasma, the occasional *_whoomph_* of plasma mortars and rockets firing, and the dull *_thud_* of grenades going off.

"_... _focus fire on the left, two squads thereâ€|_"

"_... Three down to threeâ€| forming up with Twoâ€|_"

The walls and halls of the ruins â€" a palace like castle â€" was bathed with constant changing colours of blue, green and purplish-red from incoming plasma and the yellow and orange tracers and flares of UNSC weapons.

"_... six up Four..._"

"_... INCOMING!..._"

With another flash, he saw one of the M850's "Stick-Five" get its two forward bogies tracked and the front turned to slag by a full on barrage of fuel rod rounds. The twin 120mm cannons of the MBT fired once more in defiance before wavering from their destroyed target the crew had been engaging and pointed down at the ground. The crew either dead or knocked out.

"-te..."

Different voices continued to filter in, sounding distant and muffled but Nathan could've sworn he recognised one particular voice from the mix. He opened his eyes, everything was a lightshow of constant blur and a black shape of someone above him, dragging him across the ground by the shoulder.

"â€| _Brian, shit, sniper. Reggie, covering fireâ€|_"

"â€| _anotherâ€| your southâ€|_"

The flash of a grenade exploding somewhere nearby brought the figure behind and above, another ODST, helmet missing, into sharp focus.

'_Nate, come back to me_' the trooper mouthed.

_**RRRRRTTTTT. **__**RRRRRTTTTT.**_

Nathan looked down to his legs and saw a slick red blood trail snaking away across the floor as a guttural roar of an GUA-23 belonging to a F-99 UCAV thundered overhead on a gun run.

It was Chris, the team's combat medic and he was yelling at him.

But why was he doing that?

With a flash of plasma zipping past his nose, it was if he was hit by a maglev and everything came back with a rush like a tsunami to Nathan's mind, the sounds also came back including the pure agony his leg was in.

"Nate, come on keep those eyes open. Dammit, Vi! Gator squad coming in from the right! Three ten! Fifty meters!" Chris shouted, propping up a dazed Nathan against the wall whilst firing off a few bursts from his BR one handed blindly out a gap in the wall, keeping the covenant from attempting to fire back.

Nathan's muscles burned; protesting out in agony when he tried to move his arms or legs.

The distinctive crack of Violet's sniper rifle going off could still be heard over the firefight. The Ultra elite leading the squad from the north west in question collapsed to ground, dead, half the head blown away, the grunts once under its command scattered but it won't be long before they would find the courage to fight again.

Nathan squeezed his eyes shut as a explosive flash blinded him. In that time he could feel his helmet being removed. Reopening his eyes, Nathan saw Chris take out an auto-injector from a medpack and stabbed him in the leg with it. The adrenalin from the epinephrine coursed through his veins and his hearing sharpened.

"Jesus, that's way deep in there. By the way, you look like shit." Chris, observing the mess his buddy was in with an indicating hand while he popped out the empty yellow band tube with a *_ftiz-ping_*, replacing it with one marked by a green band. "You _can_ hear me, right," he asked.

A glob of spit mixed with blood escaped from the corner of his mouth as Nathan laughed, he immediately wished he didn't because of what was brought on by it. "Oh, thanks man. If it's any consolation, I can still hear church bells ringing."

Chris laughed, "Ha! Close enough."

He began treating Nathan's wounded leg and locked gazes. "I thought I lost you when that wraith opened up on us. Here, gonna need you to bite down on this; I'm not going to lie, it's gonna hurt." he said putting a mouthguard in Nathan's mouth.

"Iff ift havvn bvvv arfvvarryâ€¦ unnnngggrrr! Muufffer fffuggrrr!" was all Nathan could say as he bit down on the guard as Chris put his combat knife into his wound and worked as delicately he could to remove the offending shrapnel.

Chris didn't flinch as a flurry of plasma from a shade blurred past less than meter from his head and impacted the adjacent wall. "Almost there buddy, almost... got the sucker. Don't worry, you'll still have

a leg to walk on when I'm done." he readied the auto injector again.

Nathan spat out the mouth guard, he couldn't feel the offending object in his leg anymore but at the same time he could feel everything going numb in it. "The wraith that hit us, what of it?" he managed to say through clenched teeth.

"Scrap." he said plainly and injected Nathan in the arm. "Joey piloting Charlie-Two took it out."

"Good ol' Boomer." Nathan noted, a yawn creeping onto his face.

"Hey, stay with me. We ain't out the woods yet," Chris said, now injecting biofoam into the wound and handed Nathan a fully loaded M6H. "Just remember to aim."

"What you take me for," Nathan asked, taking the sidearm and chambering a round. "A grunt?"

"In your condition, maybe," Chris chuckled with a smirk as he tightly began wrapping a bandage tourniquet around his buddy's leg.

* * *

><p>Fireteam Roan, dirtside.

In the pouring rain even up here, Lorenski dumped Viago's collected Falcon Wing aerial decent unit into a shallow hole she had dug, marked its location before starting to shovel the dirt back over the top to hide it.

"Ugly four zero four." Taylor called in to the pelican that they HALO jumped from, "We're boots on the ground and we've got a good vantage point overlooking the spire."

"_Understood Roan._" came the upset voice of Allencourt. "_Slight hitch though. Our long range comm gear and flight systems are either down or malfunctioning. We're no longer in contact with command and navigating this mountainous area in this type of weather, we've agreed is too dangerous and risky to do so with both instruments on the fritz. So, we're gonna put down somewhere secluded to start on repairs. If you require assistance to take down something heavy, like hunter elders, a Lynch or a distraction of a scarab, we'll be unavailable until we radio back with an update on our combat status._"

"Copy Ugly, let's hope it's something trivial." Taylor said as Lorenski stamped on top of the little mound of dirt and scattered a handful chunks of rock over the top.

"_We're hoping so too. Well, happy trekking and good luck. Ugly, out._"

"Alright, you remember the lookout positions. 'Doravoai, you've got 'Nrahom and Lorenski at position two," Taylor said turning to him. "While Viago, Nipper and myself go for position one."

Both elites and spartan nodded in confirmation.

"Right." Viago said as she watched the other spartan and SpecOps elites begin to scale a rock wall with little difficulty, heading to their observation point before disappearing from sight as they hauled themselves over the top.

She removed the ARGUS from her lower back with a subtle grunt. Gripping the drone like a frisbee, she flung it into the night.

* * *

><p>Canterlot palace's north tower, Princess Celestia's personal bedchambers.

Celestia couldn't put her mind to rest. Not after the ordeal Luna bravely went through again to explain in detail about the vision dream she had.

After returning from her personal study to write down everything for a new record she had learned and gathered about her sister's dream, everything kept coming back to one thing, and one thing only. A strange landscape filled with a forest of perfectly straight pine trees and a ring of ponies surrounding an object.

Everything was basically the same but the last bit wasn't. The unknown words that was spoken in her sister's vision was overly disturbing. Celestia hadn't told Luna yet as that in a previous dream like vision of her own, she too had had something similar of those unintelligible words said to her.

Celestia shuddered a little inside as those words from her dream vision repeated again in her head. '_Rosoluguan mormeero._ _Domo'Igannon! Ree harg meri!_'

Giving a heavy hearted sigh, Celestia carefully took off her head and chest piece regalia first, placing them onto a special stand before kicking off her hoof guard protectors into a messy heap to the side. She was too bothered tonight to put them in neat order like she always did.

She knelt down by the hearth, absorbing the warming fire crackling inside its confines in contrast to the hammering of the cold rain outside against the windows. Celestia curled up on the quilt bedding, laid her head down on the silk comfort and closed her eyes in deep thought.

The next thing Celestia knew there was a crash of thunder that woke her with a start.

Peering around through dreary eyes, she saw Philomena sitting on her perch, head burrowed into a wing and sleeping peacefully despite the hammering of the rain from the storm outside. Moving her gaze on up for the clock on the wall she noticed the magic rune keeping the fire alive in the hearth had died down to the point that a simple wind gust could snuff it out.

Celestia looked at the time. Ten to twelve. She had nodded off on the floor again. That's the fourteenth time she'd done this this month.

Stifling a yawn, Celestia stretched out her back with a series of popping *_clicks_* as she stood while listening for the rolls of the thunder outside to settle once more before slowly making headway for the comfort of her bed.

As Celestia drew back the sheets back with a ample flick of magic and was about to lie down on the comfort of the overly comfortable mattress when her ears picked out a strange droning sound as the rumble of the thunder died down.

The peculiar droning was a like the ending of a thunder roll but it was like it was on a loop. Laying her head down onto the silk pillow, Celestia closed her eyes as she continued to listen when the odd sound suddenly crescendoed into a deep rumble and-

**SCHHHEEE - ROOOAAARRR**

Rudely awoken, Philomena woke up with a startled squawk, almost falling off her perch in the process while in the meantime, Celestia grabbed hold of the closest bed pole as the very floor and windows of her room shuddered and shook.

As the tremor abated, Celestia began to hear a number of urgent hoofsteps accompanied by the sounds of armour jingling, rapidly approaching down the hall that lead to her chamber door. The hoofsteps stopped and a tapping rapid rapping sounded on her door.

"Enter." Celestia said as she composed herself, hopping out of bed and levitating her regalia chest piece back into place just as the doors opened to show princess Luna accompanied by two of her personal guards; one a thestral, the other a pegasus.

"Sister, I trust you heard that." Luna said coming in with a hurried move in her step, the guards that came with stayed outside to guard as they were trained to do while the doors closed shut.

"Yes, I heard it and felt it." Celestia said slipping on her golden hoof guards.

Luna stopped and looked past Tia to the cushion in front of the fireplace then back to her with a sly smile.

"You fell asleep on the floor again, didn't you?"

Celestia bit her lower lip in consideration. "Might have."

"It's not good for your back." Luna teased, bumping her side into hers.

Celestia bumped her back with a smirk crossing her lips, "And neither is sneaking early morning snacks before bed," she paused for an odd reason. "Woonna."

Luna stopped at the mention of the name, ears folding back and body going rigid at the time.

"I thought you agreed via a signed decree that that name will never be uttered again." Luna said, eyes narrowing and forcing herself to not snarl as she did so.

Celestia couldn't help but snigger at her sister's stern expression. "But you're so cute when you do that."

"Never again, please." she said, a small smile forming itself against her will into the corner of her mouth.

"Yes, my little Woonna." Celestia smirked, barely holding back her giggles as Luna snorted in a huff.

Luna had all the right intentions to clop her sister across the muzzle as stated clearly in the written decree, but just the way Celestia had said it caused Luna to suddenly burst out giggling instead.

Hearing the droning sound build up again; this one an octave higher in pitch, the princesses of Equestria stopped their laughter and returned back to being serious.

"The cause of the noise, did you see it?"

"I did not, but the two guards that I have with me outside have," Luna said looking back to the closed bedchamber doors. "They saw what it was, some sort of flying angular craft when they were on their rounds on the western wall."

"Their names?"

"Nightshade and Ebony Star."

"Nice pair." Celestia mused as she finally levitated her regalia tiara onto her head. "A stallion thestral that has been rumoured to have been born with a cutie mark and a mare pegasus that has an acute sensitivity to sunlight, hence her temporary reassignment to night watch duties for some less strained hours."

Luna gazed at her suspiciously, "I'm surprised you know much of this so well, Tia."

"Its our job to know. Where would Equestria be without us? But you already knew that." Celestia said going over to the doors that lead to her personal balcony, horn and door handle aglow. "Also, there is some things that guard gossip can reveal that other forms take very long to process, and the fact Ebony Star was on my personal security detail for any night occasions." she opened the doors with a flick of magic and both princesses stepped out into the night, the slanting rain spitting in their faces.

The low droning sound in the air could be now heard clearly with them open and it sounded as if it was building up to its crescendo roar that shook the palace like an earthquake, like it did earlier.

The two peered into the murky gloom of the night, their natural nightvision doing wonders as the droning sound got louder by the second.

Two minutes elapsed when suddenly-

"Sister, there!" Luna exclaimed, pointing a hoof out ahead.

"I see it."

Spiralling down out of a cloud bank like enraged super phoenixes out of Tartarus came not one, but three flying crafts. The first two were greyish white, sharp edged and boxy while the third trailing slightly in behind them was the opposite. Deep blue metallic sheen, curved, almost aquatic looking in nature.

One of the grey things suddenly pitched sharply straight up, going full vertical, dropping sphere's of yellow light behind it in the process while revealing the full underside profile of the object for the princesses to see for a scant few seconds before it knifed into the clouds above, disappearing out of sight.

However, with one gone it still left the other two that were still approaching, now even closer and appearing more threatening. Even though it was partly obscured by the grey one, the front of blue one suddenly flashed with light of an even brighter blue.

The grey one jinked around hard, almost constantly flipping and rolling all over the night sky with speeds only professional pegasus flyers could in their wildest dreams be able to fly at as small blue orbs skimmed past around it.

It was being shot at by some kind of weapon that resembled much like concentrated magical fire. After more jinking and discomfoting looking high speed maneuvers from both that'll make any typical pegasus pony come close to blacking out, the boxy craft snapped sharply over to the right, rolling as it turned to go left that Luna recognised as the beginning of a move called a split S. The blue one doggedly following before the grey craft reversed snapped back with a half roll to go back the other way.

The blue craft still stayed firmly locked on the grey one's tail and began scoring hits. The rear of the grey craft started to leave a trail of grey smoke in its wake.

Without any warning, the grey craft pitched its nose sharply up 90 degrees so it was now travelling vertical; nose pointing in the air, ass at the ground, and dramatically losing airspeed in the process. The blue craft didn't anticipate this move and overshot. The grey one pitched back forward, levelled out, lined up on the rear of the blue one and let loose something long and tubular straight into the back of it.

One second it was there, the next it was gone; replaced by an electric blue flash and expanding falling debris created in the aftermath of an explosion.

There was no doubt to the two princesses minds that these craft, both appearing to belong to two unknown parties of technological advancement had engaged each other for two things and two things only.

Fight or die.

Celestia and Luna had just witnessed bloodshed to be spilled over Equestria, but not realising yet this wasn't for the first time in one thousand and a few years.

The smoking grey craft inverted with a roll and blundered belly first into a bank of clouds above only to come back, replaced by the one that disappeared into them earlier, and this one was heading towards Canterlot city, towards the two alicorn sisters.

With a great beat from her wings, princess Celestia took off from the balcony much to Luna's surprise and aghast reaction.

"Tiaaaa! Wait up! Where are you going?! You're not ser-" Luna cried out, taking off as well and her words drowning out.

Celestia didn't question herself as to why she'd taken off, but deep down she felt this was the right thing to do. Entrap this deadly thing in her magic, force it to stop, uncover who the individuals were piloting these things and learn about the craft at the same time.

Celestia increased her airspeed, closing the distance with the incoming craft while leaving her sister behind in her figurative dust.

As she got closer, the boxy craft grew in size to that of a royal carriage and didn't look that boxy or sharp angled after all, it appeared more streamlined and exotic, not that it mattered now. It saw the alicorn and rolled over on its side to avoid her.

Too late.

Before it could zoom past, the entire craft was enveloped in the princess's golden hue magic aura and it shuddered to a halt in midair. Princess Celestia smiled with satisfaction with the successful sizeable catch. _Gotcha. Now lets see who you belong toâ€|_

Careful not to drain her magic all at once, the princess channeled a spell into the magical grip to briefly scan the craft to discover why she had stopped it in the first place.

And discover something disturbing she did.

Even though the front half, what she assumed was the nose, was big enough to probably accommodate an adult sized pony if one was to lay down inside, nothing living was detected in the craft to dictate its actions. It was all machine, from tip to tail to the tips of its wings. Metal; wiring; some type of glass; and a whole lot of something else crammed inside that she had no clue as to what they were or what they did function wise.

But if it was all machine, the commands of what it had carried out had to have come from somewhere.

If it wasn't loud enough already, Celestia almost cancelled her holding spell around the grey craft in startlement as twin roaring blue flames suddenly appeared ejecting from its rear and as pieces of metal, large and small, that appeared to be at first part of the flat wings and tailfins, begun to move up or down or side to side in a somewhat frantic manner. It took a moment for Celestia to realise this was how the grey craft powered and controlled itself from crashing as it flew through the air.

It was trying to move out of her magical grip, but with her holding it in place as it is and without any air flowing over its fixed metal wings to keep it aloft, the actions it did were pointless. Then all at once, everything went silent. The blaring roaring sound it produced and all movements ceased. The twin blue jets she had seen previously coming out the back of it, died back and flicked out while at the same time all of the moving control surfaces went still.

"You could'veâ€¦ warned meâ€¦ for what youâ€¦ were going to doâ€¦ and could'veâ€¦ waited forâ€¦ some guardsâ€¦ to accompanyâ€¦" Luna said, now caught up to Celestia and panting between deep breaths.

"I think that's a little late for that, don't you think?"

**Ker-clunk.**

To their surprise, a long yet fat conical tube, tapering at each end with one single little stubby fin near its rear, appearing similar much like the one launched at the blue craft that equaled its demise, detached from under the craft's innermost left wing, tumbling end over end into the darkness.

Celestia kept her eyes on the craft to see what it'll do next when the tips of its wings and tailfins lit up with tiny white and red lights which began to pulse on and off in a pattern.

_How oddâ€¦ _

"Tia! To your left!" Luna cried, her horn encased and glowing with magic.

With the grey machine still encased in her magic and not going anywhere anytime soon, Celestia turned at her sister's warning to look in the direction.

Swooping down from the clouds with unnatural grace due to their shape came three other blue flying craft. These were way far larger, maybe a size of a medium sized yacht, and not at all like the kind that was blown to pieces, appearing somewhat flat, piscine, teardrop-like shaped.

One of the teardrop-like crafts angled in towards the two alicorns and the front of it flashed blue. Once again, blue bolts very similar to the other one she had seen raced through the air, a bolt or two striking the grey craft in her hold.

A single impulse went through Celestia's mind; she dropped it.

The grey machine, now free of her magical grip, plunged like a stone for a second before the shrill roaring noise it produced returned and the craft shot forwards, away from them before going vertical and spearing into the clouds.

The blue fire coming from first blue craft didn't stop, instead it switched to a new target.

This particular target being a pearlescent white alicorn with a shimmering daylight coloured mane hovering in midair against a grey black background of an active thunderstorm.

The streaming blue bolts zipped around Celestia but bizarrely didn't hit her. The reason for this being a deep blue shield had appeared before the princess which had been casted by Luna around the both of them, stopping the bolts from hitting them both.

In spite of this, the two other craft opened up as well, adding more strain on Luna's protective shield and the concentration she was devoting to keeping it up.

A blue sparkly ball-like thing dropped out from the belly of the third craft like a stone as the three passed low over them and impacted dead center of Luna's projected shield.

**CRRRRAAACCKKK!***

The blinding explosion that erupted was tremendous and the shield failed almost instantaneously, cracking and falling apart in a million splinters as Luna couldn't bear the immense strain of keeping the spell going on any longer.

With the shield down, one of the three crafts lazily turned back around and strafed its blue bolts across at the alicorn princesses like a scythe.

The bolts of blue fire missed Celestia but struck Luna full in the side, stitching from her chest all the way along to her flank, each bolt agonisingly burning away at her dark blue coat. Luna cried out in sheer anguish as the pain she endured was so horrendous that she blacked out, losing all consciousness, including her ability to fly.

"Aaaahhh!"

"Luna!" Celestia cried as her sister tumbled out of control from the sky.

What most ponies forgot nowadays to remember is that both alicorn sisters was immortal in a way; longevity and all that, it did not translate directly to being invincible as well.

Luna fell, where she ended up smashing head first into a semi deep pool of mud.

**RRRRRRTTTTT- Fwoosh.***

The skin of the incoming teardrop craft sparked an electric bright blue and in a sluggish fashion, veered off from its attack run before the second blue craft that had turned in directly behind it was greeted in the nose by a white vapor trail that ended in orange explosion, knocking the teardrop blue craft off course but not destroying it as the skin of it reacted the same way as the first one did.

Inverting out of the clouds above the two princesses came the three sleek grey craft; not just the one with the smoky trail, but also the one that was previously in Celestia's magical grip and another one, thundered in, heading directly for the teardrop shaped crafts without a second pause.

Landing next to her prone sister, Celestia thankfully saw that Luna's chest rose and fell indicating she was still alive and breathing but didn't react in the way she hoped when she moved Luna up out of the pool onto the grass where she nuzzled her sister under the chin to check to see if she was alright.

To say princess Celestia was outraged before would be an understatement.

She was furious, seething within.

These blue teardrop craft had attacked them and hurt her Luna without reasonable cause.

Stepping a bit aways from her unconscious sister with tears of rage, Celestia launched herself high up into the night sky, her horn and body encasing in a golden aura, her eyes turning white from the surging magic while her mane and tail turned to fire shining brighter than the sun she rose.

All the rain, the very the storm itself dried up mid hydrant pour and began to disperse. Only the Everfree forest, Ponyville and the surrounding areas far off to the west was still overshadowed by the active thunderstorm.

With a murderous glare, Celestia encased the first teardrop craft she saw next with her magic and threw it in angered rage back at two new ones that just blasted through the burning falling wreckage of two of the grey machines without so much of a scratch.

* * *

><p>In the cockpit of G97H-TC 'Ugly 404'.

It was like someone had come along and turned off the tap.

"That was... sudden." Relcam said as he peered through the plexiglass canopy as the drumming pounding rain just receded midway through its hydrant pour.

Allencourt peered through as well before opening the cockpit door and shook it off with a shrug, "Yeah well, just like the intel said about this world, freak weather. C'mon, now since there's a break in this for the time being, let us see if we can't fix the system so we can actually fly in a straight line." Allencourt patted 'Relcam softly on the arm as she went by him into the troop hold just as the radio sounded.

"_Roan to Ugly._"

'Relcam watched as Allencourt went outside before pressing the flashing comm icon on the nearest screen. "Ugly here. Send it."

"_Observation of the spire complete, trekking for the source of the darkzone, shouldn't take long_."

"Roger. We've got the radio functional again and we're forwarding your progress status back to C&C. In the meantime, we're working on

the navigation, check back in when you destroy the generator, we figure we'll be finished by then to lend you a hand on any clean up you might need before pick up."

"_Any help is appreciated, Ugly._ _We'll see if we can at least try to leave something fun for you to do. Roan, out._"

Allencourt's voice sounded in 'Relcam's ear, "Shall we get started?"

The sangheili nodded to himself and toggled on the port side wing floodlight.

Less than a quarter on an hour had passed after Roan had radioed in and the clouds in the sky had begun to scatter, illuminating parts of the area in a wash of soft bluish white light reflected off the moon.

"Ossis! Is it still stuck like that?" came the demanding voice of Allencourt, her boots sticking out the side from underneath the pelican's nose gun pod.

"Yes." 'Relcam said, still not so pleased as he percussion hit both his and her's flight instrument dashes in concern with a fist, specifically his backup analog Attitude Director Indicator per Allencourt's earlier request. While they were still on the ground, the ADI was still telling him that the pelican had flipped upside down, even after he had rebooted it twice.

There was a clinking of tools as she let out a mumbled groan, struggling to loosen something. "Ugh. I tell ya, these interferences are great and all enough to have around, whatever the heck they are, blocking the covies from getting an accurate ID on us from anywhere on this shitty place, but it's cursed enough that it has has a conscience to suddenly somehow, when we flew back in the direction towards it and decides that this isn't fair and Mike Foxtrots both our systems to- arc thingy."

'Relcam rummaged through the kit for the desired tool for a minute. When he found it, he tossed the black and blue bottle down by her boots as he took in what she said a moment ago under advisement, "I understand. What is the human saying for this? '_Life's a bitch._'"

"Eh, yeah," Allencourt uncaringly scoffed, knocking the solder tool up with a boot so that it rolled under the fuselage and into her open palm. Intermediate _fwhizz_ sounds could be heard as she began to work away at what she now determined was the problem.

"I'd rank this as one... maybe," she grunted in mock jubilation. "Phew, huzzarâ€¦ okay, try it now! And don't forget to give it a good whack this time!"

'Relcam rebooted the systems and hit the instrument flight panel on top hard with a closed fist twice. All the previous malfunctioning analog aids and dials either flipped or spun back to show their correct display orientation. He pressed the test button for the ADI and it worked the way like it should've been behaving long ago.

Muffled shouting was heard coming from beneath the nose, "Well? What happened up there? Did it work?"

"Apparently, for now."

Allencourt grunted as she shimmied her way back out from underneath the nose of the pelican. When she finally squirmed out into the soft moonlight poking through the clouds, one could see that her face was splotted with grime and hydraulic fluid.

She leaned up on her elbows in the grass and lifted up her visor, "I wonder how the drones' are faring with this shit in their electronic systems for being so close," and looked up to 'Relcam who was now outside and sporting wide grin. He offered her a helping hand up.

"And wipe that grin off your jaws, Ossis. I know perfectly well what you saw and it's not fair on me." she smirked as she was hauled up the elite pilot. "It's the stupid rumour of us being together is one of the reasons why the quote hasn't changed."

At this, 'Relcam just seemed to rearranged his jaws into what passed for a broader grin for a sangheili when there was a loud *crack* as something stepped on a twig or branch. Allencourt and 'Relcam spun around, all traces of their banter gone, snapping their sidearms up in a flash and pointing roughly in the direction of where they heard the disturbance.

"By Luna's-"

"Shhhhâ€¦ it'll hear you."

"Don't you mean-"

**Clang.**

The voices, the sound of something being hit and collapsing caused 'Relcam to think more practically, switching out his pistol to his hip clamp and reach over to his back for his storm rifle. Allencourt reached over to an access panel on the side of the pelican, near the nose, and switched off the floodlight on the portside wing, letting the black of night take over.

As the area around the pelican was plunged into darkness, he primed his weapon. The warming up whine cut through the hanging still of the air like a knife as the hushed whispering voices came again, only this time one was absent.

"Do you think they picked up on that?" questioned one.

"Jeez, what made you think that, batbrain? Even I saw that." answered another.

Allencourt slid her visor down, and with a *click* her NVDs activated, turning the surroundings a grainy green glow as she shifted her aim at one of the shadowy figures she could see, presumably from the one that spoke a second ago as it moved to reposition, and in the process giving away its position.

"_Freeze! Hold it right there!" she ordered loudly enough that it

could scare a grunt into wetting itself. "Any sudden moves and it's a bullet to your spine. Simple decision really, don't move or move so I can make you a paraplegic or quadriplegic, your choice." Allencourt adjusted her barrel where she believed the neck would be.

To be honest, it was almost impossible to figure out at just where she was aiming at but it had to be one of the species in the Shadowed Blade ranks, because whatever it was had just spoken in english and was male.

First thing, it definitely wasn't human or sangheili, no questioning that. They were the only UNSC/CSE team deployed out this far. Beginning with the little ones first; was it a grunt?

The shadow figure stayed put, at a loss on what to do next.

No, just too tall and it didn't sound high pitched or wimpy enough.

It was a good sign, it meant it had the capacity to know the consequences of her words, but something still felt off about this, just the way it had paused. It had reminded Allencourt of how a deer or an animal of similar traits would've reacted if caught in the glaring floodlights of an approaching warthog.

Kig-Yar then?

"Okay you in the trees, what you're gonna do now is that you're gonna come towards me. Try any funny business and it's the spine results thing, got it?"

The shape in the dark seemed to take an even longer pause to something next to it, before nodding and moving slowly in a beeline straight for her in compliance to her orders.

No, not birdlike enough, then again, the shifty looking thing appeared as if it had some sort of feather quills.

"That's the way. Nice, slow and easy now."

Yanme'e? Nah, that list could potentially go on, and on, and onâ€|

The figure continued to move as ordered and not before long, it emerged straight into the moonlight from under the shadowy darkness cast by the trees.

Allencourt didn't flinch as a raindrop hit her squarely on the nose. She blinked, mentally shaking her head to clear it of any fatigue as her aim wavered off to the side.

The heck?

* * *

><p>It was hard going knowing that the teardrop-like craft had some form of shields of their own, but it wasn't impossible to deplete them; quite easy in fact as the longer she held them in her magical grip or hit them with accurate spells from a distance, the more they drained away to nothing.<p>

Celestia, with all her might, spun around the last of the teardrop craft directly into the other remaining identical craft firing at her. The two met in spectacular fashion, turning into a mixed ball of purple blue flaming carnage that fell to the earth with a earth shaking *_Whumph_*. Then finally, all at once, everything returned to normal, apart from the rain from the scattered storm clouds returning with a mere drizzle.

Letting out a deep breath, Celestia relaxed. The intense magic surrounding her horn and the blinding golden aura around her disappeared. Her hair returned to its normal wavy four toned form as she glided back and landed next to where she had put her sister.

As she lightly touched down, Luna stirred.

"Luna?" Celestia said kneeling down in the wet grass next to her.

"Unnnghâ€|" she groaned, groggily sitting up and rubbing her sore head. "â€| Tia? Wha- what happened? The last thing I remember was projecting a shield spell for us from those things then wham, there was a flash- _hurk_" she was immediately cut off by Celestia's wings brought her close straight into a warm cuddle.

"Don't ever do that to me again."

"Ahhâ€| do what? And how did I getâ€| down here?" Luna said as she returned the warm hug before noticing the twisted chaos of carnage strewn around the area. Astonished and slightly put off by this sight, she pushed herself away a little out of the embrace. "What did you do?"

Celestia smiled sheepishly, "I'll explain what happened on our way back home, to be dry and warm again. Can you fly?" she then asked concerned, looking over Luna while folding her wings from the cuddle.

Luna got to her hooves and stretched out her wings without much difficulty other than a few prangs of stiffness down along where she was hit.

"I can manage."

Celestia nodded and looked around herself at the damage she had created in her fit of protective rage. "Come, we'll come back here in the morning to figure this out further, but right now let's stick to what we have gathered so far."

"I like the sound of that, Tia." Luna agreed and took off with her back to Canterlot.

* * *

><p>Had the alicorn sisters turned to look over their shoulders one last time at the strewn wreckage as they left the area, they would've noticed a large piece from one of the seraph wreckages was booted away with force.<p>

Emerging, crawling out and eventually standing tall in the drizzling

rain, a little worse for wear, came an elite clad in dark blue purple Ranger combat armour, a sizeable crack running through its visor.

It looked around, grasping both tightly at its inactive energy hilt and plasma rifle, scrutinising the destruction and carnage strewn about it. With an sneering growl, it sprinted off, heading in the direction where it saw the alicorns fly off too in determined brooding silence.

* * *

><p>Ten minutes later, the princesses of Day and Night returned to Canterlot without further incident from any flying craft or rumbling droning sounds and landed back on the balcony they took off from in relative silence.<p>

"But Tia, that spell," Luna said apprehensively, walking back indoors with Celestia, "After what you did, there is a reason why last time we-

Celestia interrupted, putting a hoof up to her sister's lips. "I remember the dangers, dear sister. I wouldn't have asked you to do it with me in the first place if you didn't trust my judgement."

"So, where do you think would be a good place to do this? Doing this in one of our rooms is out of the question as they contain too much sentimental value if something was to go wrong."

"The dungeons," Celestia suggested.

Luna frowned in apprehension, "Just how much do you remember when we tried this last time, Tia?"

"Obviously not much than I thought I did, judging by your look. So, what is your suggestion on where it should be done?"

"Well, definitely not the archives, don't want a repeat of that, umâ€¦" Luna said tapping her chin in thought. "The throne room."

Celestia stopped over by the bedchamber doors and opened them to reveal the guards still guarding the entrance in silence that Luna had brought with her at the beginning of all this.

"That'll do." and she walked out.

* * *

><p>Facing each other, the two alicorn princesses knelt down on their cushions in the room and touched the tips of their horns against one another.<p>

"Right." Luna said as calmly as she could, trying to not let the nervousness escape past her lips. "Deep breaths, slow and-" A sharp pain lanced down into her skull.

There was a sharp crackle of electricity as the princesses magic started to become intertwined with each other and flow down their horns.

It wasn't unlike the worst brain-freeze Celestia had ever had, it was more like as if somepony had drove an ice-pick deep into the back of her brain.

"What do you see?" she asked as she strained to keep the memory of the craft stable as she could.

Luna increased her magic flow as it went over her sister's scan of the craft.

"I seeâ€¦ I seeâ€¦ the nose, its wings, the tail fins-"

"Skip that part. Look for identifying features. Crests, symbols, markings, things like that."

"Right, markingsâ€¦" she opened her eyes in triumph. "Huzzar! Crests. Three of them. One occurring more often than the others."

"Describe them."

Luna furrowed her brow in concentration. "Uhh, lets see hereâ€¦"

Of the first she described was of a symbol painted halfway up near the nose. It was an intricate and colourful circular crest emblem of black, white, and yellow that depicted a dark mountain range with what looked like the sun cresting between a gap, but the most attention grabbing of the crest was that boarding around the outside like a ring.

"There are words... in a ring around it. Almost all in-"

But before Luna could go further, there was a sudden feedback surge of magic and both alicorns violently convulsed. Seeing the princesses in agony, the two unicorn guards in the room rushed over to offer assistance.

"Stay back, I've got this." Luna commanded, holding out a hoof to keep them from coming closer.

One of them didn't appear that convinced as Luna cringed as she said the words, "Are you sure, Your Majesty? Perhaps this can-"

"No! This must be done." Celestia snapped at the guard.

Now realising what he just did, the guard fell back, head held low in shame for speaking out to the princess in such a manner, and without his shocked partner, he left the room, giving the alicorns their space once more.

"Sister," Luna whispered into Celestia's ear. "While he was indeed out of place, he does bring forward a good point. This needs to be done later, this type of magic works best after the subjects, me and you, are well rested. It was this very thing that caused it to go wrong last time."

Celestia shot her a furious glare. "Those things attacked us without provocation, they took you down without trying,"

Well not exactly true. Granted, Celestia and Luna weren't expecting or prepared for this type of thing to happen the way they did. They

had only been wearing the most basic regalia and not their royal battle armour. Had they known about what was going to happen, both princesses; without question, would've adorned the latter.

"And I want to know why these grey ones didn't, even though they had the chance and decided to to help protect us instead. The sooner we get a solid understanding on what is truly going on, the better we can prepare for what is sure to come."

Luna sighed as she re-lit her horn, she knew what Tia had said was true. It was why she had agreed to go through with this in the first place.

Luna pressed the tip of her horn against Celestia's and the magic re-entered her sister's mind straight back for the ringed words.

"Words and numbers, all in capitals and in the basic Gryphon and Equus."

That was oddly surprising to hear that Equus, quite a very dead language and that was succeeded by what is called simply Equestrian in pony society, had been used but even more so was the use of Gryphon.

Was this some kind of technology the griffons failed to bring forward to the table? Celestia thought to herself but immediately rejected it. _No, if they did, they would've been boasting about it long ago before the annual diplomatic talks. There was much more to this story._

Luna's voice brought Celestia back to the situation at hoof. "Unsc Gallipoli. Stalwart class. Two five four one, eff eff gee dash five eight eight. Duty ante nos."

"Duty ante nosâ€¦ Duty ante- Duty before us."

The next symbol Luna described consisted of some type of two pronged blade with two spread eagle wings behind it. This one was once again depicted as a circular crest, but it was smaller, less attention grabbing, and was a complete light grey; almost blending into the skin of the craft.

"No. Five zero seven, unsc slash-"

"Unsc again?" Celestia said suddenly as her ears picked out the word.

"Yes sister. But perhaps I'm not transcribing this right, maybe it's short hoof for an acronym. For what though? I do not know,"

"A very high possibility, what comes after the _slash_ part before I interrupted you?"

"CSE." Luna said, pronouncing the supposed word as 'Cisse'.

"Anything after that?"

"Expeditionary recon air and space wing. Gee ell eye, dash seven

seven."

"Hmm, perhaps you are right. Last crest."

"Just a second Tia, there's something scratched in underneath."

"Be quick about it, I don't know how much longer I can keep this up," Celestia groaned through gritted teeth. "The burning headaches are getting to me."

"Dormieris cumâ€| uno oculoâ€| aperta. Remnant." Luna said, "Sleep with one eye open, Remnant. I've never heard such an expression used before in our time, have you?"

But Celestia had a good idea as to what that meant. She had heard the modern day translation saying brought up by Shining Armour in a defence review meeting once when he had been Captain of the Guard here in Canterlot. "Later," she said waving a hoof for Luna to finish up.

The last marking appeared the most and it was of an eagle, its wings spread high and wide, and a shield in the center with the word UNSC spilling out across it.

The intertwined magic dissipated from around their horns as the two separated.

"'U' 'N' 'S' 'C'. Definitely an acronym." Celestia started massaging her sore head.

"Tia, what happened out there tonight could very well be the very reason of all the negative things that has happened over Equestria as of late."

"Yes, you could be right, but why reveal themselves now? I'll admit it, these two partly unknown parties of high capabilities have kept themselves from being seen by all of ponykind and by us in the light of truth so far, so why enter it so destructively?"

"They we're forced too."

"But forced by whom and in which order? We have only just begun to draw at straws looking for any lead to the answer to the bigger picture."

Luna didn't have an answer to that when there was a clamour as a night guard suddenly burst in.

"Your Highnesses," he said bowing quickly, "Apologies for interrupting in such a manner but there is something hovering just outside the city gates that requires yourâ€| foresight to deal with appropriately."

"Something?" Celestia asked with a raised eyebrow.

"We've never before seen or dealt with such a contraption before, princess. Flat, disk like, making a strange droning buzzing sound like a bee but higher."

Celestia and Luna glanced at each other.

"It wouldn't happen to be grey and have something like an eagle marking on it, would it?" Luna inquired, looking sternly at the guard.

The earth pony nervously swallowed and nodded.

4. Chapter 3: Squall Part I

****Disclaimer:** I do not own Halo or My Little Pony. They belong to Microsoft/343 Industries and Hasbro respectfully but all original content is mine.**

****Chapter 3: Squall Part I****

* * *

><p>Troop Bay of Pelican of pelican G97H-TC: 'Ugly 404'.

No musical tunes trilled over the Pelican's troop bay speakers, only the constant rushing sound of the cold night air and the roaring drone of the engines could be heard as Ossis 'Relcam stood solemnly over near the open ramp door as Allencourt guided the dropship through a maze of valley's through this Equestrian night sky, observing the valley far below him as it twisted and turned away like a gigantic serpent.

Cradled in his hold, 'Relcam went over his T-55 DER/A or as it was otherwise known as the Storm rifle— well, what was left of it.

With a melted barrel and a cracked cooling shroud. The Storm rifle wasn't in much of a state to be used for a fight other than being used for spare parts or an extremely large paperweight.

Sounding with a hardly audible hiss, 'Relcam pressed the release button with a thumb and slid out the conical charge coil located at the centre of the weapon. As he resecured the practically useless rifle to his back for the moment so that he could examine an undamaged one with its charge coil missing, he felt the deck plates beneath his boots vibrate ever so slightly.

An equine, a grey coated colt with a dark purple mane and grey coat; a nocturnal subspecies of 'Ponykind' called a 'Batpony' or lesser known as a 'Thestral' because of the bat like wings and tuff tipped ears, trotted up behind and alongside 'Relcam. The nocturnal pony's overall size was no bigger than the average Unggoy.

"I guess I should be the one to apologise and say thank you." the guardspony had to shout in order to be heard over the din of the Pelican's engines when he sat down on his haunches, but not directly next to the imposing Sangheili.

Even though this one was friendly, the batpony wasn't about to put his fears aside and side up against one. Having been yelled at in the face calling for his end by one, which thankfully wasn't around anymore period, and about to be skewered by a sword made of contained energy, had taken a toll on his mind.

'Relcam angled his head ever so slightly from the rifle and endless forest of green below in order to glance at the pony sitting down near him. The colt, now mostly stripped down off of what in Allencourt's description as medieval silverish purple armour leaving only the chest plate from the insistence from batpony's patrol leader.

"For saving my lifeâ€¦ our lives," the colt rubbed a shoulder with a fore hoof. "You know, after what Starfire did at you from above." the batpony closed his eyes and sighed heavily before reopening them. "I don't know how things would've turned out if you didn't understand the apology."

'Relcam turned his partial attention from the batpony back to the Storm rifle in his grip, "A rudimentary misunderstandingâ€¦" he said in the native language that the equine spoke. English. "From both our sides." and inserted the conical charge.

With a loud audible whine, the status lights of rifle glowed a deep blue as the battery powered the weapon up. 'Relcam didn't pay much attention as the pony by his boots sharply looked up at the sound.

"It's not over, is it?" the batpony said with grave concern, still looking at the rifle.

At this, 'Relcam completely turned his attention back to the guard and found the batpony's eyes filled with a sight he had seen in countless ones before. The majority of those types of stares he had seen were in humans.

"No. The fight continues. No matter where we travel, it is another world that has been innocently enveloped by a conflict that has no reason for being. It is countless struggle between the fight what we see is peace, for them it is power of control they seek."

In response to the saying, the batpony only seemed to shrink in size. His body posture not changing from the cowering crestfallen mood as the reality of its situation of its kinds situation continued to sink in.

Jerking the ruined rifle from his back, 'Relcam switched the rifle out with the new one before turning around, leaving the batpony to stare out into the black of night, and walked for the cockpit. On the way there, he put the destroyed rifle in the weapon rack where he got the other one.

"How are they doing back there? Comfortable?" Allencourt inquired as 'Relcam stepped into the cockpit proper and the door hissed closed.

The Sangheili only grunted in response as he pulled himself up into his seat.

"I'll take that as a yes then."

With a few inputs at her station, she transferred the Pelican's flight controls back to his.

After a few minutes elapsed, Allencourt growled in vexation and hit the wall. "God dammit!"

'Relcam's jaws twitched in concern, "What's wrong?"

"We just fixed the radio and oh, and there goes the radar, even better. We're right within the area of influence of a flux zone," Allencourt muttered as she looked down at the radar screen, which cluttered with false contacts for a few minutes.

"The radio is but a trivial matter. Once the dark zone goes, we will have coverage."

"Yeah. But as you said a second ago: once it goes. And right now, it hasn't been that yet."

"So!"

"So? So I've been trying since we left. And with Phoenix being enacted upon-" she punched the wall again out of frustration.

'Relcam's lower jaws twitched in concern for her well-being and he changed the subject. "Tell me. Do you honestly think this reign, the diarchy of these two," he rearranged his jaws to pronounce the strange word. "Alicorn princesses that they spoke very highly of, be in the best position to understand the threat the Covenant remnant present on their world?"

Allencourt glanced up out through the tinted cockpit windows to spot the gliding batpony still fully clad in the silver-ish medieval armour of that respective service branch that guided them.

She thought back to the two-way altercation that became the ambush surprise of three ways.

"They better. We all saw how exactly what the Covenant did first when they engaged them."

"And yet, still that contact makes no sense to me. One would think that they would already know, even seen my kind."

"What? Because the Covenant remnant is comprised by a large number of Sangheili?"

"There is that. But yet the Covenant to have been present on this world a long time. Do these equines know nothing of the scope the Covenant threat poses as they set foot to intrude upon their lands?"

Allencourt turned her head around to look back; "Well that prior knowledge changed tonight now didn't it?" she nodded upwards whilst toggling a few switches. "Here we go."

'Relcam turned his attention back out through the one-way tinted cockpit windows. He saw the batpony that had been guiding them hovering in mid-air and pointing with an outstretched fore hoof. Indicating out towards a smallish clearing to put down in.

The area in question was reasonable as the area served good cover

from the typical eyes of any Covenant air patrols that may pass down here and far enough from the city as to not cause an immediate panicked stir among the locals if any would come down to that area.

'Relcam pushed forwards on the controls and reduced power to the engines.

As the Pelican was two mike's out, mass slurry of blue plasma skimmed past and etched against the cockpit.

"Contact! Contact! Pair T-54s coming in at a point one five, angles twenty-nine descending." Allencourt cried as she quickly looked at the radarscope before it jammed with the flux influence, "They're coming right for our arse."

On honed years of instinct and experience, 'Relcam reacted to the incoming threat posed and slammed the throttles back to full power whilst yanking the control yoke to the right.

Despite its cumbersome looking size, the Pelican responded immediately and slewed around, facing almost nose to nose with the attack as a pair of two Type-54 Banshees dove at them out from the clouds above.

"They must've boosted nonstop all the way to catch up to us. Their anti-gravity drives are showing up as white hot on therms."

Even with her boots resting on the thruster pedals, Allencourt could still feel the heavy vibration of the nose Gatling gun rumble to life as as she squeezed off a stream of yellow tracers at the inbound attack craft.

The shields of each T-54 Banshee failed instantly.

The first one was chewed apart and exploded in a rain of blue fire as it flew head on into Allencourt's hail of auto cannon rounds. The second Banshee ate the same fate and its burning metal carcass careened into the thick wooded valley below.

"That cannot be all," 'Relcam murmured with suspicion.

Allencourt nodded to what 'Relcam was implying in silence and she scanned the overcast night sky.

"There's the rest of them." she said pointing up as multiple blue lights penetrated out of the clouds above and began to dive at a steep angle.

Inbound at almost a 900-knot closure, the scope blinked back to life, lighting up with multiple paired unfriendly CID signatures.

"Count?"

"Ten ship of paired T-fifty fours. Two ship of T-twenty nines."

'Relcam's mandibles twitched in grave concern.

As much as the gunship variant of the Pelican was indeed a formidable craft to any attacking Covenant whether that be ground or air. The odds were stacked heavily against them in the Covenant's favour. It was going to take a miracle if they were going to live through this without being shredded to bits.

"A first priority right is to let our four legged friends off."
'Relcam proposed, "Then we don't have to worry about injuries or casualties in the eventuality that if we do go down, and go down that we might, we won't be bringing them down with us."

"Yep. One hundred percent agreed with you there. Relaying that now."

A flurry of blue plasma scratched by the cockpit canopy as screaming out of the clouds up high " each of their twin heavy plasma cannons blazing " the T-54's descended upon the Pelican with murderous intent. Allencourt didn't stall and caught one in the nose with a pre-charged blast from the M8CG/GNC. The larger, more powerful version of the shoulder fired Spartan Laser.

The Banshee's shields didn't stand a chance as the ruby red beam of energy speared through the attack craft's canopy and obliterated it.

"There they go," Allencourt said as she watched the batponies spread their wings rather eagerly and left on the troop hold security camera feed. "Starfire. Get your wings into gear"

* * *

><p>"" Multiple bogies incoming, advise you to find a safe place to hole down in while we deal with them." Starfire heard the human pilot feminine voice ring sharply in her ear, courtesy of a modified human earpiece fixed on one of her tuff ears and throat microphone strapped around her throat. "I've told the rest of your team to do the same. They are heading for the ground as I speak."

Starfire was relieved at that, "Thank you for doing that for them, for me. However. Not that I want to argue at time like this, but as I'm still quite able, this is my home. My world. And under all rights it falls under my duty to protect it." Starfire stressed out into the throat microphone as she flew hard through Equestrian's skies like she never had before. Diving, dodging, weaving, once or even twice landing upon the tops of the silverish purple crafts that spewed intense neon burning blue fire.

"Of course we can all sympathise with what you're experiencing. We ourselves have experienced something like that all too much. But there's far too many, even for you. While we had admired your sheer tenacity at going at the Covenant despite knowing nothing to zilch about them or us at the clearing to protect your fellow squad mates; I'll still pointedly stress out to you that any slip up again with these guys - no matter how marginal - will result in either you being seriously wounded or dead. _

_And I don't do bits and pieces. _

_And I'm pretty sure I definitely don't want to end up and say

something along the lines to your princesses if we pull a miracle out of this: "Greetings from humanity of the United Earth Government and United Nations Space Command Defence Force with the Combined Sangheili Empire, your graces. We mean you no harm to you or your people. We had a first contact with one of your patrols with a bit of a ruckus meet up with a bunch of devote multi-race lunatics calling themselves the reformed Covenant. Which of who have caused great turmoil, and destruction, and pain in the ass throughout our own occupied systems. Sorry that the patrol we met up with is in tatters and that we're missing one. The officer in charge was negligent and got grilled when she went toe to toe withâ€¦ eight ship of Covenant Banshee fighters._

So, Sergeant? Now that I have said it, do you see where I have a problem with this now?"

Starfire sighed in frustration as well in acceptance.

The myth and supposed rumour now truth has a point, Starfire.
Starfire told herself as she rolled inverted and sharply dove for the deck.

"As soon as I joined up, slogged by butt through the CARG for two years and graduated, all graduates had to swear an oath, an obligation we ponies in the royal guard and even the E.U.P. to some extent cannot break. To serve as the Princess's protectors, and to those under their charge, with everypony we are charged to, to upkeep the everlasting peace in Equestria. Whether that be in times of a great crisis or war, we will try our best to uphold itâ€¦ no matter the cost."

Starfire had no idea what prompted her to add the last bit, as it was never part of the oath saying.

With a Banshee in tow, plasma nipping at her flank, Starfire soared past the nose of the lumbering Pelican, lit up like a tree on a cold Hearth's Warming Eve. Although the difference here was that the dropship was about the size of a small house and destroyed things rather than forgave and love.

When she looked back, the Banshee that had its claws sunk in her rear trailed from the sky on fire. An entire wing having been sheared off by a scything spread of 70mm Armour-Piercing High-Explosive auto-cannon shells.

"_Fine._" she heard the human relent, "_But stay tight and follow any of my orders to the letter. Got it?_"

"Crystal."

"_Okay, keep doing what you're doing. But be warned as you climb. Up high are at least two other contacts. Of which are T-29 Vampires._"

Starfire immediately picked up the agitation in the human girl's voice.

"How bad?" Starfire asked with agitation of her own.

The Sangheili answered her instead. "While a T-29 close support

fighter are bulky in a sense and their front somewhat resembles the jaws of an ant, its main offensive weapon, a heavy needler, on its dorsal end is a danger to anything airborne, whether that be metal or flesh. Also be wary of the two plasma cannons it wields on its flanks."

"_Thanks for the technical overview there, Osis._" she heard Allencourt say in return. "_Anyways, remember those small needle pink crystalline shards those Covenant soldiers used against you? About the length of my hand; explodes or just shatters, that I then had to pull out the micro fragments from one your squad mates sides?_"

Starfire refrained herself from speaking as the vivid traumatising and terrifying memory flashed before her.

Allencourt's voice quickly brought Starfire back to reality, "_Now think of those rounds a little shorter than the total length of a standard broom handle, can penetrate parts of our airframe like a hot knife through butter, and can home in towards you despite hiding in a cloud. And there can be a total of six of these._"

She immediately felt sick as she had the sudden terrible thought about what one would do to a pony. What six could do if-

"Then I assume you have a plan?" Starfire fretfully added.

Allencourt was surprisingly absolutely calm with her answer. "_Of course we have a plan. Don't be absurd. Although, that the plan usually involves flanking them with some kind of air support. Like Sparrowhawks or a Falcon or two with heavy payloadsâ€¦_"

Earlier Starfire with her patrol squad had a brief discussion with the human and her Sangheili partner about why the transport craft was named after a bird. They all quickly learned after that mostly all human vehicles that flew or could hover were named after a bird or insect.

She had a bad feeling about where this was going.

"_I know this is a big ask considering we just met, fought off the Covenant patrol together but did some questionable things that is just considered wrong by your standards, and I just earlier ordered you to stand downâ€¦ but, if willing, lend a handâ€¦ err hoof in your case, be our air support? Go up there and see if you can lure them down to us?_"

Starfire was stunned, but not in the good way as the gears in her mind grinded to a halt and she sprung her wings out as the result. All forward momentum she had been doing came to a jarring halt in mid-air before dropping straight down into a large and thick storm cloud.

The pilot of the Banshee that was trailing her, one of the few left remaining in the sky overshot the batpony. He became baffled when the equine didn't re-emerge out from the bottom of the grey cloud.

"What!" Starfire screamed out. Her voice slightly muffled as she

stood within the cloud.

The covvie pilot came in for a second pass, thinking long and hard back as to what he was informed what some of these equine creatures could impossibly do. A metaphorical light bulb went off in his mind and the Covenant pilot deployed the air brakes.

"_... And that is what the plan involves, for the safety sake for all of us in the next few hours." the human pilot explained the plan out quickly, "If even one survived the ordeal and continued its flight path towards your city, I'd hate to think what kind of turmoil it would yield despite your deepest confidence in your princesses dealings, including this power, this "magic" you briefly went over with us._"

The T-54 came to a less graceful shuddering halt in mid-air and pivoted on the spot. Its plasma cannons pointed directly at the cloud the pilot thought he saw the batpony drop into.

Starfire's emotions were spurring into turmoil along with her stomach. She didn't want to agree with what Allencourt had said, but the human was right. They were literally a stone throw from Canterlot city.

"How would I get them to follow me?" Starfire asked as an electrical tingle ran down her spine.

"_Land on the canopy of one of them located just behind the two prominent "boom" like structures. Said booms look like a pair of jaws, and start making faces. I'm positive that should get their attention._"

The Covenant pilot clenched his joysticks, peppering the cloud with plasma round after plasma round directly into it.

Starfire poked her head out to see how dangerously quite close the Banshee that she had on her tail earlier unloading its weapon of Tartarus burning fury into the wrong cloud.

Seeing an opportunity too good to pass up and for a little experiment for sake of her curiosity, Starfire got out and pushed the cloud she had hid in directly above the attacking yet clueless attack craft. When the cloud was in position where she wanted it, she bucked the cloud in the side hard, making a lightning bolt shoot out and chain a strike along the canopy of the T-54.

The Covenant elite pilot didn't know what happened when his craft gave a shuddering dying whine, then all at once, every indicator light winked out before its eyes.

"And if it doesn't?" Starfire added quickly watching in awe as the Banshee she disabled anti-gravity drive kicked into gear a second too late from the lightning strike and pancaked into the forest belly first, erupting in a bluish white explosion.

"_Do something other than what I said. I'm ninety-eight percent sure that whatever else you come up with will give them warrant to come after you. We'll be ready with a stake and a hammer when you bring em' through. They're still currently moving cold, but if they go hot this plan and all of us are gonna be in deep shit. No pressure. Good

luck._"

* * *

><p>A Covenant Banshee exploded apart like a firework coupled with a dozen flares as four Medusa missiles found their target in the attack craft's backside.<p>

'Relcam jinked the Pelican to a new heading, "I don't know you can be so sure of yourself,"

"She'll pull it off," Allencourt said with little worry.

"That is why I'm concerned. We only then just met them in the awkwardness of situations, which then happened to almost descend into a flurry of violence. And, yet, you just recently piled a whole lot of faith on a mind that is still trying to piece tog-"

"Brake right!" Allencourt shouted in alarm.

'Relcam jerked the Pelican in the warned direction just in time to avoid a disaster as one of the Banshees wing tips blew past the canopy.

The remaining Covenant pilots had come up with a new tactic.

They had begun employing the use of their own craft as manned guided missiles to try and ram the Pelican gunship out of the sky.

"Lookâ€¦ I've got the gut feeling about her, about them. But I don't specifically know what that is."

'Relcam mumbled something out in Sangheili.

"Hey!" Allencourt snapped, "Just because you said it in your language, it doesn't imply that I didn't understand it."

* * *

><p>Covenant ranger 'Uerumee, pilot of one of the T-29 Vampire, scanned his scope of the ensuing proverbial "knife fight in a phone booth" that raged below the infernal cloud cover.<p>

'Uerumee was not that surprised to be called out to deal with a few of the subspecies of the technicoloured equines, one that flew, that desecrated the holy planet below with their filthy footsteps. However it sent his blood into a rage when a dropship belonging to one of the non-believer races infernal military had been reported in the area supporting them.

UNSC.

Humans.

The Elite growled as a distant memory he thought he had banished from his mind of seeing the female leader of the humans' government shook hands with the false Arbiter.

Heretics! The lot of them!

****Thud.****

What?

'Uerumee snapped his head up at the sound and saw one of the four legged annoyances he and his brothers had been sent to deal with standing on the outside of his canopy, and it was staring back.

How did-?

'Uerumee jerked his Vampire violently from side to side to try and dislodge the stupid pest off, but the pony remained glued to the outside. Before he could even think of rolling his craft inverted, the pony stomped down with its two front legs hard on the canopy.

With a great *_crraaacck_*, the force of the hit sent a myriad of spider web like cracks snaking outwards from the impact site, making their way across the Vampire's cockpit canopy and making it nigh impossible for him to see out.

Enraged, 'Uerumee reached over for his inactive energy sword hilt.

*** * ***

><p>Starfire heard the satisfying sound beneath her hooves as the purplish metal like skin cracked and splintered under the stomp.<p>

On her flight up here, before she lay within one of the clouds choosing carefully on which Vampire to go at, Starfire had decided on that simply making faces while standing on flying war machines wasn't going to warrant much in the alien pilot's eyes other than be a lacklustre nuisance to them, but perhaps breaking something would.

In all honesty while she saw the canopy fracture beneath her hooves into a billion spider webs of cracks and fractures across its entirety of the blue reflective window, she didn't think that her stomp would be that effective.

Fwizz!****

Starfire jumped back, recoiling as two pointed crackling cyan blades appeared inches from her nose.

Out of harm's way for the moment and looking down, Starfire watched as the two-pronged sword she had seen before wielded by the one of the alien pilots of the Pelican retract from the perforated canopy then it was gone altogether, which was then followed by the shattered canopy that was booted completely off.

Exposed to the night and elements, Starfire could see the various glowing blue and pink alien dials and buttons inside the cockpit used to control the alien craft she stood precariously near the edge of.

Also inside, extremely unhappy at her for the damage caused to its aircraft, the Elite pilot stood up and aggressively reignited its energy sword and lunged.

Starfire ducked low, feeling the heat in the air spike as the energy sword missed her as the pilot took a swipe at her.

Starfire darted around the Elite as it swung at her again, moving to the rear of the alien craft and instinctively reached back for the sheath that held her own sword.

It was there, at the worst possible moment in her career and life when she remembered exactly what happened in the aftermath of the clearing as her hoof grasped at empty air when there should've had been a sword hilt.

"Narr jah, Nishum!" **[Face me, parasite!]**

Starfire spun around to the translated words that rung in her ear, almost knocking her head against the legs of the Elite pilot.

Now standing outside of the cockpit, the Elite's hand shot out and clutched tightly around Starfire's throat before lifting the struggling batpony up to its eye level.

"Do you think that allying yourselves with the heretics will stop your destruction?" it shook her, spitting in anger as it moved its sword dangerously close to her face.

Starfire spat at the Elite in defiance.

The Sangheili tightened his grip around the batpony's neck, "For that I will personally see to that your death will be drawn out as long as I have envisioned it."

By now, beads of sweat poured down from under Starfire's helmet and rolled down her face as the intense heat from the energy sword made her swelter as it drew within inches of her nose she could almost lick it.

The Elite squeezed her throat even tighter. "My face will be the last thing your pathetic little eyes ever see."

Sneering once more, the sword was brought back away in preparation to strike when a grey purple blur slammed into the backside of the Elite, forcing it to stumble and its personal shielding flared brightly from a blow.

Starfire fell from the Elite's tight grasp as it roared in pain as well as anger as it groped behind itself.

As it turned around, its back now to her, she saw that one of her squad mates had plunged his service issued sword deeply into the Elite's exposed part of the neck and was working the blade back and forth. Dark purple blood streamed up from the wound.

Then, without so much as a warning, the Sangheili stopped its thrashing and dropped its energy sword.

Starfire watched on as the Covenant pilot fell to its knees with utter shock of disbelief and keeled over, tumbling off the aircraft it once piloted into the black of night.

Starfire gazed over to her squad mate who had brazenly assaulted the Elite from behind sheathed his sword as he panted hard.

"Nightbreak?" she called, having to shout over the Vampire's engine drone, "What by Luna's ire are you doing here? I specifically ordered you to stay with the others, no matter what happens to me."

"No pony goes at it alone. You know that, Sargeâ€¦ we all know that," he said firmly. "It's the first thing they told us back in boot, and I couldn't just sit on the sidelines, twiddling my hooves waiting to hear from the human that you got yourself killed or worse for something we should be doing together as a unitâ€¦ as a team to do our jobs to protect Equestria."

Starfire knew he was right, but he was still foolish to attack the Elite one on one, even if it was for revenge for what another one had done to his leg.

Nightbreak looked about himself and the hovering alien aircraft they were still standing on, "So now that that's over. How do we take out this thing?"

Starfire looked down at the purple-blue metal skin of the craft.

"I think I've got an idea, and I'm going to need your help." Starfire said, her gaze shifting over to the dropped inactive energy sword hilt.

* * *

><p>"Well you don't see that everyday," Allencourt muttered as she watched as the batpony Starfire blurred past the cockpit canopy.<p>

But the equine officer was not alone as she spied another one of her kind flit past, closely followed by a pilotless Vampire spiralling down out of the clouds in a flat spin, an active energy sword shoved into the controls within the windowless cockpit.

"There's the other one," 'Relcam pointed out sternly as he maneuvered the dropship for Allencourt to acquire a better firing solution. Out of the corner of her eye, she caught Starfire landing into the top of a tree presumably where the rest of her squad had taken up shelter.

"ASGM's still acquiring lockâ€¦"

The heavy needle cannon on the remaining T-29's dorsal surface rotated and pointed in their direction, the rounds of Blamite glinting with a sinister neon pink glow as lightning struck out around them.

"Come on you covvie bastard, put it off- Good tone!"

A shill solid growling tone sounded in Allencourt's ears and she jammed her finger down on the trigger.

The T-29 fired a scant moment later.

Four ASGM-10 missiles and their high explosive tipped warheads dropped away from their launch pylons, rocket motors kicking in a moment later, and thundered off towards target. At the same time all of the six three foot long crystalline rounds of Blamite sliced through the air, the strange tracking abilities of the pink crystal homing in towards the Pelican.

'Relcam kicked the thruster pedals and angled the Pelican, presenting a harder profile, while all at the same time dispensing chaff of a special type designed by ONI that was meant to confuse many types of tracking munitions.

The Covenant pilot did the same as he saw the missiles track towards him with deadly earnest. Deploying a bright bluish countermeasure flare of some type that didn't fall behind it, but rather shot out ahead.

The Covenant flare fooled two.

The Vampire vanished in a ball of explosive white light as it took the two remaining UNSC missiles directly to the cockpit, tracking right in between the twin boom like protrusions.

'Relcam and Allencourt couldn't marvel at the success as the Blamite from the Vampire veered in with accurate efficiency.

"Coming up on the right,"

"Breaking left,"

The flares decoyed twoâ€|

The evasive flying avoided oneâ€|

The right side wing copped the rest.

The four-foot long Blamite missiles penetrated deep into the starboard wing and detonated. The crystalline shards exploded with deadly fashion, perforating the wing like buckshot to hot butter.

* * *

><p>Down on the ground and from an elevated position, Starfire and her squad could only watch on in alarm. Their mood previously switching from cheering jubilating from witnessing the Vampire explode to horrified shock as the Pelican spun out of control from the sky, gouts of flames licking out from one of its engines.<p>

Over her earpiece the human had given her, Starfire heard the desperate call for help.

"_Mayday, mayday, mayday! This is pilot seventy-eight-dash-nine Allencourt from dropship Ugly four-zero-four to any UNSC or CSE on this frequency. Condition Phoenix. I repeat. Condition Phoenix. Encountered four Echo Tangos of undocumented equine calling themselves ponies. Mayday, mayday--"

Starfire didn't catch the rest as a piercing and sickening mechanical wail drowned out the call. She looked on as the Pelican regained some

way of control of forward flight before it just disappeared from view belly first into the treetops.

Half a second moment later, an earth shuddering rumble was felt through the their hooves as was accompanied by the panicked squawking cries of birds and animals having being awoken by the shudder.

Rooted firmly to the ground, Starfire felt a pit form in her stomach form as, her squad included, could only stare at the column of smoke that had begun to slowly rise from a fair distance away where the Pelican had vanished from view into the woodlands.

* * *

><p>The Great Hall of Stories, five long arduous corridors later from Canterlot Academy of the Royal Guard armoury.

"Sister," Princess Luna asked again in worry, turning to Celestia with a concerned expression as they continued to transverse the many halls of Canterlot in relative silence.

The shifting and clanking of armour plates moving was the only other sound heard through the hallways as the two alicorn princesses, now completely clad in their personalised royal armour.

The silver armour Luna was clad in covered the majority if not every part of her body. Head, chest, flank, legs; even the silvery plates of armour covered her cutie mark.

Celestia's golden armour on the other hoof only covered her head, legs and chest. Everything else was exposed. But there was a solid reason for that.

It was to be noted that Celestia's mane and tail was kept in check with rings to keep it from being a nuisance. Luna's hair was untouched with such precautions and flowed normally.

There was however three things in common with their armour. One was a prominent curved spike that stuck out from their helmets and followed up next to their horns. The second was that both sets of armour were etched with each sister's respective cutie marks.

And lastly, both princesses armour were imbued with enchantments. Even to this day in time, no pony knows the full effects and capabilities of the enchantments that the princesses themselves had imbued the sets of armour with.

Behind and walking in front as they transversed the castle's great halls was a small contingent of night and batpony royal guards, led by Captain Greystone. Overall commander of the medium sized contingent of Night Royal Guard based here in Canterlot.

"I still see that this revelation still weighs heavily your mind, Tia. Do you still want to share it with me?"

Celestia cocked her head over at her little sister, the silver armour she wore glinting majestically in the flickering torchlight like the brightest stars in the night sky. Luna could always tell when she was

worried whether she showed it or not.

"It's nothing." Celestia said.

Luna glanced over in disbelief as they passed through a set of double doors.

Celestia let out a long stressed sigh, "If this disc is the same as these other craft from earlier tonight. What would it stop it from comprehending our attire? Our peaceful intent that we represent and not going against those set from its masters?"

They passed through another set of double doors and to the outside into the cool night air.

The late night stars high above twinkled brightly without a care in the world of what turmoil was occurring below and the moon slowly drifted for the horizon. Eventually it would reach the horizon and be time for Celestia to commence the day with her sun rising charge.

"Surely you don't mean it like that, Tia."

Celestia stopped, "I'm afraid it does have to be like this. You see, little sister, it is like this-" she began when all of a sudden she was interrupted by shrill buzzing sound and the numerous sounds of thudding hooves pounding the cobbled street.

Zooming around the corner in a flash of grey and with unnatural grace that didn't seem possible for its large size or its flat design was the grey disc they had set out tonight to deal with.

The flying disc object was indeed perfectly circular like the guard had described, but also it was very broad in a sense and flat in shape. Everything about the grey disc was smooth in design, as if it was the designer's very intention. Apart from a few stubby antennas as well as a few dozen small holes that appeared to have been stopped up with glass dotting around its circumference, its core centre from the top and bottom was hollow and contained rapidly spinning fan blades that spun in different directions.

To see these spinning fan blades in the first place, both alicorn princesses got this chance to see in the centre of this gullet of the flying disc as it pulled up hard to stop itself from flying right into everypony.

"Apologiesâ€¦ Your Highnesses," the guard who had been chasing the disc said.

The unicorn was almost out of breath as he came to a panting stop before them from galloping down the street, bowing apologetically as the disc shunted away.

"Once we received word that you were coming to deal with it, we were able to keep it outside for a time. Butâ€¦ wellâ€¦" he fumbled his words and pointed a hoof at the grey disc that now stared unfazed down three in-rushing pegasi guards flying low in from opposite directions, "... It is quite slippery."

"Quite," Luna winced just as the guardsponies, the three of whom had

been probably chasing it down all the way from the main gate, came together in a smashing crunch of silver armoured limbs as the disc zoomed straight up.

As if to add insult to injury as the guards groans and muffled curses came from them like a river as they tried to untangle themselves from the pile up, the disc did a little backflip despite its flat aerodynamic dimensions and tilted from side to side very quickly like it was laughing at their attempt to corner it.

"Just may I inquire as to how it managed to get past you and your men in the first place?" Luna inquired as the disc stopped its visual laughing and lazily floated back over towards the princesses.

The little flying machine stopped, hovering about an inch off the tip of her armoured muzzle.

When the guardspony unicorn didn't respond immediately, Luna's brows furrowed, her eyes narrowing with an ear flicked in irritation.

The unicorn stiffened and cleared his throat, not knowing that the princess of the night had narrowed her eyes not at him, but at the disc because of the annoying droning buzzing sound it constantly produced to keep itself aloft.

"Itâ€¦ it simply flew over the city walls, princess." he responded with embarrassment.

Behind her, Celestia heard Captain Greystone groan accompanied with the sound of metal striking metal. An evident sound that he just faced hoofed.

Celestia mentally rolled her eyes whilst still keeping a straight face and her placid nature. _Leave it to Lulu to humiliate a respected guard in front of his peers and his commanding officer._

"Well, at least it is here and there is no need to travel by hoof to it now," one guard openly commented for them all.

Yes indeed. But the question on Celestia's mind now was: Now that it was here and not out there, what were they to do with it?

It didn't look like it could do any harm. But looks could may well be deceiving as she knew from many years of experience and what had just occurred in the Equestrian night sky not long ago.

Celestia watched with a stern expression; secretly in fascination as the grey disc spiralled slowly around her little sister.

Luna also well kept a wary eye on it as well, but more out in concern for her own safety for every second of the way as it made its way almost behind her for the second time.

The disc came to a stop just before it could round Luna's backside.

Celestia became more intrigued with the machine as it inched closer to Luna's behind.

A sudden flash of white light came from the disc, startling everypony and almost blinding those who had their complete attention focused on it.

As the sunspots from the flash cleared, Celestia released just as to what had transpired when Luna gasped shock as well as irked embarrassment. Luna's cheeks had flushed a deep rosy red before she turned around to face and growl at it.

It just took a picture of Luna's cutie mark.

Celestia understood very well what was very really going through Luna's mind. But due to the circumstances of how it all happened right there and so easily, she couldn't help it and tried to suppress a laugh.

"Oh come on! Really? You think that's funny?" Luna scowled back at Celestia who was doing the terrible job at trying to hide the smirk.

"Oh lighten up, Luna. I'm sure that was just for scientific purposes." Celestia playfully giggled, gesturing at it with a hoof. "Who or whatever this UNSC is, they are just curious despite what we encountered up there. They mean us no harm at the moment, that can be as seen so far with this."

"Yeah. No harm. As if." Luna pointed at the disc, "But Tia! That thing just took a picture of my rump without my consent!"

"And what do you want me to do about it, huh? Give it a hard slap and say: '_Naughty flying disc._' Or perhaps give it a whack with my sword? Surely that will paint a great reason that we mean no harm."

In response Luna groaned in vexation, glaring daggers at Celestia and muttered, "Hope it does yours next."

"And if it doesn't?" Celestia asked with a sly smile as the disc moved away from Luna and came to hover in front of her.

"I'll do it myself when you're in the bath." Luna replied with an evil smirk.

With a soft smile, Celestia rolled her eyes at Luna as she followed the disc again every moment of the way as it moved slowly from her head and down her side.

As stated before, the machine was quite very curious to watch, almost mesmerizing in a way as it glided along her length with painstaking care. As it arrived halfway down her body a minute later, it suddenly jerked away as if it was startled by something, spun, tilted up-

**Fwiss!**

Everypony flinched as a thin purple dazzling beam burned through the air and struck dead centre of the hovering disc.

"What the-?" a guard started as the flying disc machine blew apart in spectacular fashion as the beam hit it.

The disc exploded in a shower of sparks and shrapnel before falling in heavy metal crunching *thud* as it greeted the ground.

Every royal guard spun around, facing in different directions trying to determine where the magic spell had come from while the majority formed a protective ring around the princesses.

__**Fwiss!**__

Another dazzling and almost silent beam shot out of the dark, missed the remains of the disc machine entirely and struck a guardspony in his armoured flank.

The guardspony didn't have time to scream let alone express it other than his eyes going wide in shock as the beam went right on through his armour like it was made of tissue paper.

The beam didn't stop there.

After having gone through the guard's body and out the other side right through his right wing, it ricocheted sharply off the path flagstones, tore through the chest of another guardspony, before exiting at an oblique angle and dissipated against the leg of a pony statue holding the flag of Canterlot.

__**Fwi-zang!**__

Luna threw up a hoof to block the bright flare that emanated from her sister's armour. The protective enchantments successfully warding off the beam that struck somewhere between where Tia's wings adjoined her body.

No pony could think. They could only stare at the traumatising horror before them as the guardsponies who were struck by the single beam keeled over, collapsing in their own expanding pools of blood.

Somewhere out among the towers of Canterlot, an annoyed squawking cry rang out. Cutting through the night air, which sounded like somepony choking a rooster.

Luna spun in the direction of where she could hear the crowing cry, blinking rapidly to clear the sunspots that formed as Celestia's armour enchantments had reacted to the third beam.

As the guards finally came to their senses over the shock they began to do everything in their power to save their fellow struck brethren.

After a couple more rapid clearing blinks and out of the corner of her eye, Luna saw a bright glint of blue appear in the dark and her adrenalin surged.

Luna threw up a blue magical shield in front of herself as well as for everypony just in time for another purple blue beam to strike out from the dark of night and this one shocked her to the core.

Not because the beam had been glaringly bright as it was fired, but

because whoever had fired it, had aimed it dead centre right between her eyes.

Luna watched in mesmerised horror as the effects of the beam's impact rippled out like a stone thrown into a pond as the protective spell continued to disburse the accelerated energy safely.

Through onto the other side of the blue magical shield she had erected and coming into sharp focus, princess Luna discovered where exactly the beam had come from.

While her night vision was superb - a trait that alicorns shared with all of the pegasi and the subspecies of batponies many of whom are still proudly serving in the night guard - Luna could only make out a the small glowing vivid blue light coming from the balcony of one of the many towers that housed the more higher status ponies.

The cyan blue light shone brightly in the dark.

The light was very out of place compared to the only other light source of the dull faint yellow glow of the gas lit street lamps below.

There was never any doubt in anypony's mind, hers or Celestia's, which this light belonged to the thing that was attacking them from afar.

Luna took off in a strong beat of her wings, dropping the shield spell as she sped in the direction of the blue glow of light.

The bright blue light shifted position suddenly and disappeared, winking out of existence.

No!

Princess Luna mentally bucked herself as she landed on very the balcony she had seen the unearthly light.

How could she be so naive to rush for the murderer by flying without thinking the number one question as to whoever it was could've seen them from such a distance under the cover of night and in this type of lighting conditions.

She should've teleported.

Luna scanned to her left to where she had seen the light before it disappeared and saw leaning up against the wall a long angular object.

It was an object that immediately made her feel sick as it shone in the light of her horn with a smooth and disconcerting purple colour sheen.

Luna swallowed her dread and steeled herself as she enveloped up the alien weapon in telekinesis magic to examine it closer.

The weapon in question, unmistakably alien in origin and design, tapered to a sharp menacing point at one end while it was splayed wide at the other. A small channel that glowed a brilliant magenta pink ran from the centre of sharp end all the way to a circular

mechanism with a circular hollow centre and five shimmering glowing pink circles.

It didn't take a genius to figure out how someone had to use it, as this was a hand held weapon because the holes were just too small to be used by someone with hooves.

Luna had no idea how much time had elapsed as she was absorbed into studying the weapon when the fluttering beat of multiple flapping wings and the unmistakable rattle of shifting armour she was acutely accustomed to sounded behind her.

"Princess Luna? Is that it? Is that the weapon that killed my men?" Greystone announced his presence.

Without uttering a word, the princess of the night levitated the weapon over to him and dropped it at his hooves. Turning right around, she opened the balcony doors a crack with a flick of magic from her horn.

Luna recoiled almost immediately. Her nostrils greeted by a foul stench of something horrible, and most of all, the rancid overabundance of fear she could taste at the back of her throat that almost made her throw up on the spot.

Luna pulled her head away and shot Greystone a sentencing glare. "Lock down the city. Triple guard on every the entrance, and personally see to it Greystone, that you and a portion of your guards will guard the main entrance to this tower. Seal it off. I want whomever this murderer is found and brought before us. It has a trial I wish it not to miss."

"But whoever this is proves to be too much of a handle," Princess Celestia added steadfastly, folding her wings after landing behind her sister. "You must do what is not considered lightly."

Greystone shifted his observation of the long weapon over to the princess of the sun to ask if she was being serious with the last bit. As he did, he saw a sight that would've made anypony's blood freeze twice over.

Celestia's gaze she returned to him was hard and cold, unwavering in their piercing glare.

Greystone swallowed hard as he bowed, "It shall be done." and left. Leaving only one guard behind, a batpony, and the long alien weapon leaning up against the railing.

Luna turned to the guardspony, "Nightshade. Remain here. If anything that isn't us and without our say-so tries to flee through these doors, do not hesitate to use extreme prejudice."

Nightshade nodded sharply, "Of course, Princess Luna." and promptly placed a fore hoof upon his short-sword hilt.

Luna encased the foreign weapon in her magic, brought it inside with her, put it down, shut the glass windowed balcony doors and drew the curtains closed before turned her full attention back to the darkness that somewhat consumed room. Only their natural night vision kept the place from being fully engulfed by the dark of the night.

"I heard. How?" Luna asked, her blue and Celestia's magenta eyes the only things glowing in the dark.

"The first guard that was struck was declared dead on scene. The shot went right through his heart. The other bled out on his way to the academy infirmary." she said with sorrow, "Before the first guard was covered and taken away, I saw that he had received second to third degree burns to his coat from where the beam had struck and that his armour where he was hit had been heated to a rainbow shine." Celestia said before asking: "Do you have it?"

With a flick of her magic, Luna levitated the long purple alien weapon over to Celestia.

Celestia growled angrily as she examined the weapon closely herself. Even in her golden magical grip, the golden glowing shine didn't help ease the pain of what she had seen as it added even more deadly intent the weapon posed.

Why would something create such a means of destruction? Celestia asked herself, even though she already knew the answer the moment as soon as she put it down and toggled on the light switch on the other side of the room.

Revealed immediately before the two sisters the entirety of the room had been tossed and was the scene of horror to a great struggle of survival.

The walls and ceiling were covered by scorch marks from either missed magic spell discharges or whatever their attacker had been using. Small tables had been overturned, bookshelves toppled over, the grand dining table had been turned into cinders. Broken glass covered the floor like some miscreant young filly had gone and dumped a load of glitter there.

How this much evidence of a ruckus had gone unreported shocked Celestia as, coupled with irate anger and despair, she scanned the room.

Then all at once, all of the destruction and mayhem that had occurred here never seemed to do justice anymore when her eyes came to what lay in the epicentre of all this.

Lying in contorted unnatural positions on the floor before them, the ruthlessly bloodied and beaten corpses of two ponies, both mares, a cerise unicorn and a light green Earth pony.

Celestia knelt next to the unicorn and carefully parted the mare's mane from her face. When she did, she closed her eyes in grief. A tear forming in the corner of her eye before rolling down her face.

She knew these two. Not from planned social meetings. No. It was more on a personal level.

It was Sapphire Dream and Riverbend, proud time owners of the 'Elite Equine Spa' and probably the best place to get a hooficure as well as to let off the stresses of work in Celestia's opinion. But also they were good close friends to her that their presence or a friendly

smile from them always seemed to make any day just that little less stress free.

The tear that rolled down Celestia's cheek evaporated as her blood came to a boil as she saw that where Riverbend's cutie mark should have been there had been attempts to remove it physically with some type of blade. And a hot one at that.

Deep bloody lacerations criss-crossed or bordered around the cutie mark. She looked over to Sapphire and saw the same thing, only this time she couldn't make out the mark at all on the mare it was erased by deep lacerations.

"Whenever we catch those responsible, they will rue the day they had ever set foot in Equestria." she said deeply.

Luna cast a sideways glance over at Celestia. Creases of worry etching themselves past her own glare of ire.

Celestia's eyes flickered over towards the far side of the room and steeled herself, her horn abuzz with magic.

"Do you think it was so easy?" she spoke low without emotion, facing in the direction a warping disturbance trying hard to hide behind a wilted potted fern. "To try hide from us for what you have done?!" and launched the collected magic at the crouched invisible figure.

Luna watched as the spot Celestia had launched a spell at struck centre mass of a warping haze which resulted with more than shocking results for all three.

The cloaking field that concealed the bipedal figure failed immediately, revealing to the two alicorns a large and sinister looking biped avian alien clad in sleek and completely black armour.

The avian was about as tall as the average pony but not as tall as Luna or Celestia. Everything about it pointed out it was agile and not to be pushed around. As would any creature, no matter how passive it was perceived.

The alien legs were two reverse jointed much like a bird but stockier. On top of the agile body and covered by an armoured plated neck was a sharply beaked head with bony facial features, two amber eyes with one covered by a semi-transparent mechanical eyepiece that glowed a crystal blue. The back of its head was covered in a plumage of long dark black feathers. And right now the thing was contorting horrendously in pain as more than 50,000 volts from Celestia's lightning spell coursed across its body.

The creature fell to the floor accompanied along with the red glowing blade of sorts that had the hilt of what appeared to be some sort of cutlass, was dropped from the grip of one of its two sharp appearing three fingered claws.

The ruby red blade broke apart. Shattering as it impacted against the marble floor.

"You freaks will pay dearly for that," the avian alien threatened in

semi-perfect Equestrian.

The alien's male voice rasped deeply as it rolled over and propped itself up from the floor with one arm while the other clutched at its heaving chest. "Not that mine has come to be already."

Luna halted before it and encased creature's body in a deep blue glow of her magic, with the magical glow more prominent around its red-throated neck and threw it up against the wall.

Celestia didn't care for the wellbeing of the alien anymore as she heard a series of bones snap from the impact.

"Who sent you?! Why did you kill them?! Why did have you tried to kill us!" Luna yelled.

Instead of answering to the demanding questions, the avian alien had other ideas.

"No matter how you go about this, Woonas, " the avian chuckled menacingly at the name to which Luna became even more livid to, "Your ****pathetic**** little rule will still not save your kind's end."

"H-h-h-how did you k-know of that name!?" Luna stammered as she yelled at the alien, horn glowing brighter and getting right up in its face. "Nopony should know that!"

The avian was unperturbed by her response and yawned, showing off a number of pointy sharp looking teeth ticking her off even more.

It simply pointed one of its sharp talons at Celestia who barely raised an eyebrow at it. "Did you really think that you were alone in your bed chambers every night?"

Celestia's subtle surprise disappeared as soon as the emotion tried to show and locked eyes with the avian being. It smirked sinisterly in return.

"I know everything about you and your kind, and my brotherâ€¦ well let's just say he wanted to keep tabs on you until the time came," the avian flinched as if startled by something before reaching down and pulled something large and golden from a pouch strapped to its leg.

The alien tossed Celestia's neck regalia piece at her hooves. "And I'm fairly sure you'll recognise this. It was considered by you your 'good luck charm' after all." and flinched again.

Celestia's eye twinged, not bothering to acknowledge the neckpiece as it clanked to the floor before her.

She knew something was amiss when she didn't find her neckpiece where she thought she had left it five nights ago. Originally she thought it was a result of one of Luna's revenge pranks and mentally made a note to give her a week to return it before she confronted her about the matter. Ironically tonight was the night she was supposed to have confronted her about it.

"Enough of this! Who are you?" Celestia barked.

"T'vaoan," it announced, completely unperturbed to how the princesses were scowling at him. "Best of all the Kig-Yar. Leader of the Mehk. His band came for profit. They got their wish andâ€¦" it said kind of forced before nodding towards the two dead mares on the floor and chuckled deeply with a sinister undertone.

"Why? Why did you do it?"

The T'vaoan twitched and shrugged as it continued to laugh. "With these ones here, one could say ****I was**** ****bored****."

Right at the words '_I was bored_', the avian alien's voice suddenly dipped much lower than it had before. It had almost been gravelly and downright devoid of all emotion. As if it was somepony else's.

At this point Luna was grinding her teeth while Celestia was still holding back her vexation. Just.

"And my ponies? The guards?" Celestia said.

The T'vaoan jerked as it shrugged, the alien's voice having seemingly returned to normal but the twitches and muscle spasms were more present than ever like it was struggling to maintain control of something.

"More fun probably for him. Maybe ****I need**** more practice with this?"

All of a sudden it began screaming in hysterics, alternating between fear and anger. "Can't you hear him? He chants to them for your slaughter and I am his puppet! Three Geks for every equine amputation, ten if it results in a headshot, fifteen if it's a scratch off!"

Not only had it up and confessed that it was a cold-blooded murderer; the alien was also batshit insane.

The alien's mocking laughter was cut short as Celestia's horn glowed to an intense glare and shocked the T'vaoan again before Luna upped the pressure to its throat and clocked it across the face with a hoof.

The T'vaoan craned its head back up at them and spat out a globule of purple blood.

"Heh. Is that all you gotâ€¦ Woona?" it said, giving Luna a sinister smile through bloodied teeth despite missing a few and a crooked jaw.

Luna's irises shrank to pinpricks and delivered a mighty blow with a hoof straight to its stomach, to which it then tried to double over but couldn't because of the magical field it was entrapped in.

"As I drown between realities looking for redemption as he draws you out from your fantasy. ****Do you really think that shocking this non-believer and breaking every bone in its frail body is going to help your pathetic little minds find the answer you're searching for?****"

Just by the way it said that, Celestia re-focused back on the alien's eyes and noticed that the irises had changed. Gone had the colour of sap amber to a deep haunting red. The room temperature seemed to take a dip as well with this change and she felt a freezing cold chill flow through her and through her heart the longer she focused on them.

"And what do you think are we searching for?" Luna all but growled out.

The T'vaoan's irises turned black of an infinite void and began glowing with a red aura, and its broken jaw reset with a foul crack, before it answered. But in its own rasping manner from before, but of a deep demonic reverberating voice of another being that sounded vaguely familiar.

The T'vaoan's mouth moved erratically as the sinister dark voice boomed from it.

"**For eons, you have squandered the holy gifts left behind by the Ancients and seized them as your own, but no more!**"

A sudden shockwave of red and black magic blasted out from the armoured body of the T'vaoan and slammed into the princesses, levitating them high in the air for a moment before flinging them across the room.

Luna smacked headfirst into the overturned couch knocking the wind out of her, while Celestia was knocked back a considerable distance, into the opposite wall, before bouncing off it and landing face first into the still blood soaked carpet.

"**The Covenant will reclaim the gifts from your hoarding clutches and bring about a new era to the galaxy, beginning with the fall of your pathetic little race. The eradication of your pitiful existence on this holy world's surface will be a blessing of the Ancients. And We? We are their instruments!**"

Quick as a rattlesnake, the T'vaoan's feathered left arm was aglow with the same sinister red aura that engulfed its eyes and reached out towards a dark blue semi-circular weapon like pistol with a glowing green tip lying on the floor.

The next thing Celestia knew as she opened her eyes, she saw and felt the intense heat coming off from the one handed weapon pointed between her eyes.

She tried to get up but couldn't as she felt the dark magic possessed T'vaoan press its taloned foot down even harder against the side of her, right against her wing, preventing her from using her wings to bat aside the alien.

Coughing badly as she struggled to force clean air into her lungs, Luna shakily got to her hooves from being thrown across the room by the dark magic blast and looked over to where she had last seen her sister. When Luna did, her heart leaped into her throat.

The possessed T'vaoan was standing with one taloned hoof pressing down hard upon her sister. The long sleek purple weapon it had used to kill two guardsponies and then them at the beginning of all this

was being magically pulled across the room and latched to its armoured back. The pistol it held in its claws buzzed loudly as the energy collected at its tip in a bright green ball of light.

The T'vaoan moved it closer to Tia's head, leaned in and placed its other glowing taloned hand against her muzzle. In that moment in time something in Luna's eyes ignited, a look that said that her sister could never ever be touched.

"**Sing your final song, Princess Celestia, bringer of the sun.**" it sneered, "**For this is your last-**"

"YOU SHALL HARM NO MORE OR MY SISTER FOUL BEAST!"

The T'vaoan snapped its head up from Celestia to see princess Luna shrouded by a ring of blue fire that whipped like a whirlwind around the base of her hooves. And that wasn't all, her horn was surging with magical power, eyes completely crystal white.

The T'vaoan clamped the pistol to its leg and threw up its red magically encased arms at the enraged princess.

However, the alien didn't get as far as it was going to do when it was sent flying across the room in an angered screech, smashing straight through the glass doors, cannoning right past a startled and shocked Nightshade, before sailing clean over the balcony railing in a flailing of jumbled limbs after the blue magical beam that was unleashed by Luna and struck it full in the chest.

After standing in place for a few seconds, Luna blinked out of her rage and rushed over to Celestia's side. "Sister? Sister, are you okay? Tia, speak to me."

"I'm a little shaken, but I'm fine." Celestia reassured Luna with a playful smile and got up. "Thank you, Luna." and embraced her.

Luna didn't protest as she was engulfed by both of Celestia's wings. "I thought I was going to lose you," she said as they parted.

Celestia snorted, "Oh please. It'll take more than a spacefaring alien taken over by dark magic control to defeat me. Nice shot by the way. It outwardly shows that you have been learning a new thing or two by teaching at the Royal Guard academy."

"Uh..." said a hesitant voice nearby.

Both princesses turned at the attention-bringing word to see a shaken Nightshade biting back further words as he stood in the space where Luna had blasted the T'vaoan out through.

"Are you-?" Nightshade began as the princesses came onto the balcony. Celestia cleaning the rest of the blood off her face.

Celestia cut him off. "A little bruised ego but we're fine, thank you."

Nightshade breathed a sigh of relief, "I don't think you could say the same for whatever that was you hit a spell with, princess." he said as he glanced down over the railing.

Following his gaze both alicorns found far below in the middle of the street and surrounded by no more than ten of night guardsponies including Captain Greystone in a ring around it, the alien lay on its back with a starburst of blood beneath it and in a contorted position.

"A good thing we didn't go through with our usual plan." Luna remarked.

Celestia took a quick look over at her sister, "And what plan would have that been, Luna?"

"Delve into its mind after we had knocked it out cold and â€" through me and to some degree of you â€" convince it to surrender and show us its erroneous ways."

"Oh. Right. That planâ€" I don't think that would've worked."

"Yeah, I didn't think it would either, Tia."

"Mmm-hmm. "

Nothing else was said as; in a flash of golden light, Celestia teleported, with Luna doing the same and both alicorns re-appeared not a few steps away from the ring of guards keeping an eye on the alien but keeping a wary distance from it.

Luna stayed where she was but Celestia went over to the thrall of guards. They parted for the princess as she neared but Celestia stopped from going any further as a terrible gurgling voice emanated from the alien.

"Youâ€" have onlyâ€" delayed what is comingâ€" "

The T'vaoan wasn't quite dead yet.

But only just.

Clutching onto the last thread of life it had left, the alien continued to gurgle out strings of words through its bloody frothing mouth; "He has you where he wantsâ€" you will falter under his onslaughtâ€" "

Celestia could see that the T'vaoan wasn't possessed by the dark magic or whoever was controlling the alien bird in the first place anymore, but it didn't concern her or Luna nor did it to the alien as it was still bent on rubbing the coming fate in their muzzles.

Luna came alongside and placed a wing on Celestia's shoulder, "Leave it, sister. It only wants to berate us even more. It deserves to die like the monster it is."

However, Celestia ignored what Luna had said and remained where she was as her sister turned and left. She wanted to see this through to the end and, to a lesser extent, wanting to hear what it had to say.

"Not without helpâ€" he can't control actions anymoreâ€" cannot see you," the T'vaoan coughed bringing up a river of blood pouring from

its mouth, "Take thisâ€¦ please."

With its last remaining strength, the T'vaoan took a metal, rust red, half-dinner plate with a small circular hole in the middle with yellow lights, shaped object from its waist and held it up for only Celestia to take.

Right when that happened, the ring of guardsponies that surrounded the alien immediately moved aggressively forward, levelling their spears down at the T'vaoan with one guard resting his sharp tip of his spear millimetres away from the alien's red throat.

Still very much on guard, Celestia took a small half-step forward towards the T'vaoan and the object it was trying to give to her.

"Princess Celestia, wait! It's a trick!" Greystone said with alarm, "For all we know, it's probably some kind of explosive."

The T'vaoan continued to hold the alien object up for Celestia to take, "No trick. Not bombâ€¦" it managed to grate out, "Even footing."

Celestia's horn glowed and the object in the T'vaoan's claws did the same.

"Why?" Celestia asked sternly before taking it, "Why should I take this? After all the crimes you have committed against Equestria? After all that you have committed to us tonight?"

The T'vaoan's arm fell away allowing the half-disc to hover within Celestia's magical grasp and closed its eyes, "If Jah had choice, I'd have done it different. Couldn'tâ€¦ Zealot of Spireâ€¦ sent Jamataa hereâ€¦ awaiting judgement. For test. Legion Master controlled actionsâ€¦ with a Forhan Keyâ€¦ it is the tahsheeâ€¦ the Covenant wants you gone. Wants yourâ€¦ kanhohâ€¦" and with that the T'vaoan breathed its last and everything went quiet before it was punctuated by the ominous crash of thunder.

Rain began to fall as Celestia gazed down at the dead body of the T'vaoan and then to the object still within her magical grasp.

With the constant sound of *shhhhh* as the rain began to come down harder and without turning to face him, Princess Celestia addressed Greystone. "Clean this mess up and inform Canterlot police CID there's a crime scene for them up in the tower." she said in stern sadness.

Greystone got the gist of her tone and saluted and began to bark off orders. For the remainder of her part, Celestia trudged through the rain over to where Luna was standing separated a-ways from the scene under a magical spell keep the rainwater off her.

As Celestia drew abreast of Luna, she could see very well her sister was clearly upset with her actions. "You shouldn't have listened to it. After all it had done to us. It killed four ponies without any thought to its actions, and yet you show compassion for it?"

Celestia gave Luna a wary look. "No pony in their right or wrong mind

would sympathise with the terrible crimes it committed. Even though you thought this, I know I did not, don't blame yourself." and teleported the both of them where they ended up back in Canterlot castle's throne room with Celestia dripping wet while Luna was not. "But know this. No pony can understand the full potential of how dark magic can influence those with a weak mind."

Luna blew air through her teeth. "So just what is that thing there it was so desperately needed to give to you?"

Celestia rotated the alien object, "Honestly? I don't know what this is, but it said this contained an 'Even footing'."

Luna wasn't daft to what her sister said. Both knew perfectly well what the term 'Even footing' meant.

"So, where we can find this Covenant and more about it? Okay?" Luna said nodding before adding and pointing a hoof at the half circular device. "Did it mention how to use that in order to get it?"

No. No it didn't. Not once.

Celestia shook her head. "No."

Luna breathed deeply out with a sigh and closed her eyes. "Ooo, great."

Celestia walked over to her cushion of her throne and sat. There she continued to rotate the object, looking with the idea that the alien had left something on it. On her third rotation, the idea she was going with came to fruition as she saw something that caught her eye.

Carved along part of the object were very small characters. Letters to be precise. Crude small letters written in Gryphon, and only very recently too.

Peering even closer to read them, Celestia flipped the object according to what she read, conjured up a quill "minus the ink pot" and threaded the tip of the quill into a smaller hole near the larger one in the center.

Despite the rainstorm outside, the audible click that came from the device sounded like to her Discord snapping his fingers in a cavern through a loudspeaker.

The object produced a strange humming noise before it projected a orange red light that ran almost entirely around the device making it almost circular.

Celestia tentatively reached out with a hoof and touched the orange red light. What she discovered then and there surprised her. The orange red light was entirely solid to the touch.

As Celestia lifted her hoof, the device "now seemingly powered on" gave a strange high pitched chime and a bunch of strange intricate triangle like symbols, each and every one bright red, a bright blue or just white arranged in different orientations, configurations and sizes appeared around within the hard purple light before disappearing completely. Leaving all but three large blue ones

which began to pulse rhythmically.

Celestia's hoof hovered over the pulsating triangles.

"Maybe Greystone is right about this being some type of explosive." Luna interrupted, giving Celestia a wary look as she sat down on her throne cushion.

"As ponies may say: Nothing ventured, nothing gained."

"I hope you're right about this. Because if you're not, and this is indeed what he said it was, you're going to cop most of the blast."

"I do hope I am right too, sister." Celestia said, her hoof coming down and lightly touching the flashing symbols.

The triangles began to pulse rapidly before disappearing as well. When nothing happened after five seconds, Luna spoke up.

"Wellâ€¦ that was a whole lot of noth-"

She was interrupted by a retching splutter and a hacking cough of a rasping male like voice that emanated from the device.

"_Alicorn princesses of the world designated as H-D-one-one-thrâ€¦ Flayed talons. I can't read my own writing. Why do I even put up with- Never mind. The designation of your world that was given is of no importance... of this continent called Equestria._"

The rasping voice belonged to the alien they had fought.

"_One of you, jah, I hope understood the scrawl I did on the underside of the Sangheili data-disc and therefore are hearing this. I'm really terrible at writing in the domo'Igannons mainstay language. So I will tell you my name, information, and the reasons of jamahtaa klual. My betrayal. Through voice.
>

My name is Tor-Yen. T'vaoan of the three Kig-Yar species. Mehoh, former Covenant marksman. Mehk. And defecting from the Covenant and aligning what remains of my mercenary group to the Combined Sangheili Empire. I've made sure this recording and files is in a language you are able to understand. Also putting this in here, you are the only ones able to access the files on the data-disc, albeit a Spartan of the UNSC, their AI's or a CSE AI will also be able to access this if they find this instead. At least they'll know what else is here if they find this and help you.

Although those two powers presence of being here is hard to predict. I haven't heard a domo'Igannon or Sangheili empire warship sighting report in months in the time I've been here.

Argh! Iâ€¦ cannotâ€¦ remiss. The control has started and I feel my end by the Legion Master draws near and time cannot be wasted.

_Contained in this data-disc is information I've managed to compile together from many weeks of listening to comm chatter about some of the patrol zones, camps, and starship staging sites of Covenant

military deployments about your continent._

I, however, cannot assure you that this information will be a hundred percent accurate. Discoveries of towns and cities I've never heard such odd names used for tend to change things around. And these changes, if they happen to be relic sites underneath or near have profound negative effects on the religious psychopaths. More often than not many have resulted in population abductions. It should also come to your attention that a Spire is close to your city and a Dark Zone generator even more so. The exact location of the Spire is finicky, however the DZG is just to your city's southeast. I've also heard that a DZG set up close enough can interfere with yourâ€¦ peculiar abilities as well.

There is one last thing.

In between the bouts of his control by the use of the neckpiece artefact, I have taken those pauses of his loss of control to eliminate the other members of the kill team position inside your cityâ€¦ So when you listen to this after my end, I would've been the only Kig-Yar left that you will need to worry about when the Legion Master sets in the motion of stages of his plan."

"Princess Celestia, news from the northern gate!" a loud and unnerved voice spoke up.

Celestia looked sharply away from listening to the recording to see a guardsmare galloping in and heading towards her in alarm.

"_Judge my nefarious actions after my death if both of you will, but do not ignore the words of those who saw the sun before youâ€¦ ughâ€¦ I have only delayed for what he sees of you and your kind: Utmost annihilation._"

I can only hope that through by my selfless actions, I have provided you enough of a head start to make a difference with your choice of conflict against the Covenant."

Luna turned to face Celestia, "Tia. Can you believe that-" and found empty air instead. She frowned and looked about herself, "Sister?"

Sporting a frown, Celestia was over far to one side of the room conversing rather rapidly with a unicorn mage guardsmare.

Luna turned to head over to her when something out of the corner of her eye caught her attention.

Said something was grey stallion pegasus with a peculiar cutie mark and an orange stripe in his steel grey tail, one that just happened to walk into the doorway and stop dead centre.

However, he wasn't facing to the inside; rather his head was turned back in the opposite direction and even though she couldn't hear him despite that she should've, it looked as if he was arguing with somepony out of sight.

Luna turned and focused on the pegasus and was about to call out to him about why he was doing here because Night Court had been adjourned long ago, when all of a sudden the orange stripe in his

tail visibly changed to white before cycling to a reddish gold and started to flow and shimmer " much like her mane and Tia's " in that colour.

That was hardly normal, especially for any pegasi or any other pony for that matter.

Luna began to move towards the pony at a brisk pace just as he turned around sharply to face back where he had come from.

Paf!****

Startled by the sound and bright flash of light that went with it, Luna turned sharply to look behind and saw that the guardsmare had teleported noisily away and that Celestia was coming over, looking very perturbed about herself.

Luna twisted back to where she last saw the pegasus.

The stallion was gone.

"Luna, what's wrong?" Celestia said noticing Luna's confusion.

"I thought" never mind. What did the guardsmare have to say?"

"Over a quarter of an hour ago, the guards of the northern gate heard a series of explosions and had spotted a dozen or so of large curved objects falling out of the storm clouds trailing blue fire."

Luna's stomach tightened just as a loud explosion rang out that also shook the floor like an earthquake before an overwhelming feeling sense of vertigo overtook her and then she passed out.

After seeing a wall of magic cascade over her and her sister, Celestia collapsed to her haunches, the blackness of unconsciousness creeping into her vision.

The last thing Celestia remembered before she herself blacked out was not the sight of Luna by her side as she collapsed down next to her, but of a serene view of a white sandy beach with, oddly, a setting blue sun in a midnight blue sky touching the horizon and the strange warm feeling of a large figure sitting next to her.

The next thing Celestia knew, it was whispering in her ear loud enough to be heard over the sounds of the crashing waves and the giggles of laughter both close and distant.

"With me by your side, your sister, and mine. These coming days are going to be just perfect" You remember, do you not? You dreamt about this since you were small"

* * *

><p>Command bridge of UNSC Arkhangelsk.

The grey arrowhead profile of the UNSC Halberd-class Mk II Destroyer prowled cautiously and menacingly through the planet's lower atmosphere and its threatening storm clouds when one of the officers

on the bridge suddenly hollered out a warning from his station.

"Commander Wen. Energy spike at one seventy nine clicks out at one-thirty southeast of our position."

As a living testament with dozens of space engagements with this Covenant remnant threat to her name, five successful in-atmosphere counterinsurgency operations, and last and not least her family's ancestry of military tactical traits dating all the way back to the Interplanetary Wars including the Rain Forest Wars of 2162.

To Wu Wen, proud commander of the newly commissioned Arkhangelsk of just three years old sat up in her commander's chair reacting on her gut instinct that was usually never wrong and issued a flurry of orders.

"Nav, come about to two-six-zero, get us in that valley."

"Aye aye, coming about to course two-six-zero, eighty percent to engines."

"Weps, countermeasures spread inâ€|"

If one could've had eyes on the warship from the outside, they would've seen the destroyer take on sudden a slanting rolling list towards the valley, banking ever so slightly over while it turned to the new course.

While Wen issued further orders, the Lieutenant that reported the initial energy spike interjected: "Commander! It's can't be the Covenant. The energy signature is not right."

Wen glanced in his direction from her chair, "That still does not reassure me, Lieutenant Jurgens. That just could mean its Forerunner instead of Covenant, which is much worse."

"No commander, Jurgens is right." the navigation lieutenant backed up with without turning around in his seat. "It's not the Covenant, and it's hardly Forerunner," he tapped at his screen, "The energy that was discharged matched nothing that I've never seen before. I'm running it through the console to see what it's got. Currently it's saying the signature doesn't match any known output and it wasn't artificial butâ€|" his console beeped with the result, "Organic? What the hell? That can't be right." he frowned as he looked at the result.

"Keep it up on your terminal, let me see." Wen got out of her chair to check to see if Nav was correct when another officer turned in their seat.

"Uh, commander? Our scanners are working again." the officer said, befuddlement plastered over his Eurasian facial features.

Wen stopped before turning to face him. "Come again?"

The ensign glanced back at his screens, "All environmental and surface scanning sensors are operating normally again. It is almost like the anomalies weren't there in the first place."

"That's improbable," Wen muttered unconvinced coming over, "Re-check your settings. The data collected from the Prowler showed that the anomalies interfered constantly with any shipborne scanning systems."

"I don't know what to make of itâ€¦ Radar, Ladar, SWIR, LWIR," he listed off quickly, hands now dancing over his holoscreens as he checked through each system. The ensign indicated to his screen with a stumped expression. "Everything is there. All back online and working normally. No anomalies detected."

Wen frowned, "If that is the case, then we must assume so does the Covenant. If they had not solved or got around the problem previously in the first place." she turned back to the crew, "Lieutenant Jurgens, get me the origin point of that energy discharge. Lieutenant Fey, reposition for a high atmosphere course and someone get jamming countermeasures online, full spectrum spread. As we climb and you detect anything remotely Covenant scanning for us, jam it."

"Aye, commander." came in the multiple stern replies of the crew.

"Commander?" the weapons officer turned in his seat as Wen returned to her command seat, "Should I divert reactor power to the main cannons and begin charging sequence?"

Wen leaned an elbow on the arm rest, contemplating on the course of action. "Not at the moment, Kirillov. The best course of action right now is an exact location, the reason why and what that energy discharge came from. Shipmaster 'Surum plans best on flexible answers not speculation," she drummed her fingers on the chair's armrest. "But spin up the 50's and warm pods 'A' through 'D'."

Kirillov nodded back in compliance, "Aye aye."

The Lieutenant's fingers danced over the numerous holographic screens to key up the archer pods and set up the targeting for the crisscrossing fire network of the eight 50mm auto cannon point defence placed in strategic hard-points on the Halberd-class MkII destroyer.

Jurgens turned in his seat with good news, "Ma'am, I've pinpointed the location of the energy spike and I'm picking up a distress call north of it on the E-band."

That got Wen's attention.

While the D-band was frequently used by the UNSC for typical military chatter and that the Covenant sporadically frequents the F- through K- bands for their chatter including broadcasting on the D- and E-bands, the E-band was designated as the emergency frequency for the UNSC.

"The E-band? On speaker."

"Aye."

The distress message that came through was choppy, but the message was clear enough to make out what was being said.

"_Mayday, mayday, mayday! This is pilot seventy-eight-dash-nine Allencourt from dropship Ugly four-zero-four to any UNSC or CSE on this frequency. Condition Phoenix. I repeat. Condition Phoenix. Encountered four Echo Tangos of undocumented equine calling themselves ponies. Mayday, mayday! Transmitting location now. Starboard side engine turbine failure. Unable to maintain altitude, we're-" the call cut to static before repeating.

It was like a lightning bolt was sent through the entire bridge, as everything was silent save for the constant beeps and whirrs of the crew station monitors.

"Did that distress message just say what I thought I heard it say?" an ensign inquired, breaking the silence.

"Phoenixâ€|" Wen said, hands clenched and her mind in wonder before snapping to, "Jurgens. Get me an high resolution scan of the surrounding landscape around that distress call's location."

"On it, Commander!" Jurgens said with renewed vigor.

It wasn't even a minute that had elapsed when the scan was complete and was put up on the centre view screen for all to see.

What happened next was a mix-match reaction of half expressed expletives from few as mostly everyone else had suddenly lost their voice.

"Commander!" a crew member hollered, "Atmospheric slipspace ruptures detected! Point three-three-"

Everyone on the bridge not sitting down was either thrown violently backwards or was knocked unsteady as the Arkhangelsk took a broadside hit from port as a corvette's prow â€' a Blockade Runner marked with the remnant Covenant markings â€' glanced off the destroyer's port side when it materialized from slipspace and struck the UNSC warship.

The only thing that prevented the Arkhangelsk from receiving catastrophic damage to its hull aside from the two-meter thick armour plating of titanium-A battleplate was the warships energy shield that dissipated the blow.

The corvette's prow continued to scrape down the port side as crewmembers gave out urgent warnings and situation reports.

"Commander! The shield's took a massive hit! It's gone down to forty percent and draining!"

"Multiple banshee fighters and Phantoms are being launched from the corvette aft launch bays!"

"Commander! They are charging weapons!"

"Battle stations!" Wen bellowed. "Kirillov! Bring point defence to bear on that corvette,"

With the hull reverberating as further orders were issued, including getting counter-boarding teams to areas as reports began to flow of

reports of enemy combatants that had made it inside, far in the distance two Covenant Man O' War warships slipped out of FTL, and instead of engaging the Arkhangelsk they changed course away from the destroyer.

"Jurgens, track those ships. Relay their current trajectory to Captain Selena if you can," Wen shouted, pointing at the two Sangheili warships as they began to move away, "And someone get me 'Surum on the horn, now!"

* * *

><p>Starfire dreamed.<p>

As she did so, her mind raced with fleeting images.

One of herself waking up in her quarters and putting on her brilliantly polished to perfection armour, gathering her patrol members, smiles and cheery moods all around, then the first order of the night from princess Luna herself: Patrol the eastern part past Canterlot's gates and sweep north, and then finding herself flying above a forested area while the rest of her patrol covered the ground.

And then the nightmares came.

They all involved a great grey green machine in the middle of a clearing and two tall figures pointing strange weapons at her people.

An imposing tall creature with four mandibles for a mouth then roaring at her and at who stood behind with the word: "_Heretics! Remove this filth!_"

Inrushing haunting cyan two pronged blades swinging for her head, cleaving clean through her steel sword as she tried to block it, only to be blocked by another pair of cyan blades in a meeting of clashing blue sparks.

Screams of: "_Get down_" and "_Get behind_" whilst blue and green bolts accompanied by unprecedented loud cannon sounding *_bangs_* pounded in the air.

Pink crystalline shards striking into the leg of one of her charges with something being told about later about being thankful it was six instead of seven.

And as every image ended, Starfire always found herself inside a red lit area with her hoof being clasped by a gloved five fingered hand and being shaken accompanied by the words of: "_A pleasure to meet you_" or "_Good to finally meet something that doesn't have sudden urge kill us right off the bat_" or "_Talk about the universe throwing a fastball evolutionary fluke. Talking horses!_"

A loud sound of crashing thunder jolted Starfire awake and in doing so, she inadvertently breathed in a mouthful of muddy water from a puddle she had collapsed next to.

"Eww! Pthewy!" Starfire spat out between retching and choking.

Now well and truly awake, Starfire looked about herself. Her face fell as her eyes adjusted to the night and looked ahead in despair as the rain drizzled down.

Everything about where she was in relation to the dropship crash site looked just as dank and grim and murky than it had ever been after she passed out from the mysterious energy wave that had to have been magical.

Stretching away in front of her was the start to a path of destruction that was created as the alien transport craft plummeted into the forest belly first.

Starfire suddenly heard a series of splashes and a crack of a twig behind her and she reared up while she whipped around with wings out and hooves up in hoof-to-hoof combat stance ready to defend herself from these voices who had decided to try and sneak up on her.

What she saw there instead was the rest of her squad, only having just awoken from the energy wave themselves.

"Whoa! Take it easy Starfire!" Nightbreak exclaimed, his hooves waving at her to calm down. "It's just us."

"Nightbreakâ€¦" Starfire relaxed and she fell back onto all fours. "You should know better; I don't like surprises. Especially about all that has been happening."

"Sorry... I'm fine by the way. How are you?"

"Fine, fine." Starfire replied with a huff. She turned to address the other two batponies standing either side of Nightbreak. "Adlyn and Eirlys? You good?"

Both guard mares shared an almost identical odd glance at each other before replying: "As good as we'll ever be, Sarge."

Starfire ruffled her wings as she turned to gaze back at the trail of destruction that had been left behind as the dropship went in with flames eating at its metal wings.

"Does anypony know where that wave of magic came from?" Nightbreak suddenly asked.

"I have no idea." Eirlys answered, "Probably somewhere behind us I think, inâ€¦ that direction." she pointed a hoof back the way they came.

Starfire set off with Eirlys falling into step next to Adlyn, while Nightbreak brought up the rear.

"That somewhere thataway is Canterlot, Eirlys." Adlyn said matter factly.

"Do you thinkâ€¦?" Eirlys said, cautiously looking about herself as they travelled further down the slope towards the river.

"Well you're just thinking it; I'm just saying it. The Covenant." Nightbreak said.

"I don't really think the Covenant can do magic, Nightbreak." Adlyn said. "Even if they did, I think the human would've mentioned it."

"How do you know that, Adlyn, hmm? How can you know that the aliens didn't just decide to hold back on their use of magic on them until now."

"I highly doubt that, Nightbreak. None of the Covenant I fought had horns."

"They could've used something elseâ€¦ l-like a wand o-or even their hands!" Nightbreak exclaimed.

"Pfft, their hands? Come on, really?"

"Yes. Eirlys, back me up here. You know what I'm on about. It's in that book I read."

"Nightbreak," Eirlys sighed and rolled her eyes, "Nothing in that is real. We all know Griffons just cannot do that. It's just a fiction novel written up by that novelist to give speculation and excitement to the reader."

Nightbreak almost tripped over as they began to move down a wet and slippery slope. "He could very well be telling the truth."

"For your information, Nightbreak," Adlyn piped in, "I've read the other books by that pony, and he is a she, and she has got one crazy imagination."

Insulted, Nightbreak brought up a retort that sounded a lot better in his head than when he said it. "Wellâ€¦ well you two can bite my flank."

Starfire sharply looked over her shoulder, "Cut the banter, we're there."

The guards looked up ahead and came eye to eye with the source of the column of smoke they had spotted soon after the UNSC Pelican had crashed.

"Oh boyâ€¦" Eirlys said faintly looking the carnage of the crash site before them.

Situated exposed completely out in the open and lying on its side, half in half out of the river with its nose buried half submerged in the river and bits and pieces of the once exceptionally large Pelican in their eyes was everywhere.

Starfire couldn't help but marvel in shocked awe as she got closer at one of the large pivotal wings â€" one which housed one of the massive engines â€" had been completely sheared off in the crash and now the wing lay speared into the ground at a slanted angle and looked like a ramp.

"I hope they survived this." Eirlys whispered into Adlyn's ear. "I really want to know h- mpfh?"

One of Adlyn's wings was firmly pressed tightly over Eirlys's mouth

preventing her from speaking any further.

"I know how you feel and it's been a long time waiting. Way too long." Adlyn hushed to her in a firm voice. "But now is not the time, especially with those two here not knowing the true verity of the situation they immerse themselves in."

"It's not like they could cause any further problems anyways."

"Shush. That type of talk is gonna get you into trouble one day and I'm not bailing you out cause it'll apply to the both of us." Adlyn said, "Come on." and hurried over to where Starfire was standing near the rear of the the Pelican.

The ramp door that was previously open when they had left to get to safety from the aerial battle was now completely sealed shut and with no obvious means of reopening it.

"Is there any way to open the door from out here?" Nightbreak said.

"If there is, I don't see it," Starfire said as she looked along the side of the Pelican, "And I doubt that we'll be able to use it anyway even if we did find it."

"Wha-" Nightbreak started.

Starfire turned and gestured to her and his hooves.

"Oh. Right." he said just as the piercing wail of an anti-gravity drive came screaming overhead.

Snapping her head up to the sound, Starfire spotted two Banshee's flying very low, following the path of the river before wheeling around in the sky and coming back towards them... or more likely back to the crashed Pelican.

She watched as the twin Covenant Banshee's swooped in overhead for a second pass "lower this time" before they landed a little ways upstream.

Not knowing whether they were spotted or not from the low passes, all Starfire was able to say was: "Hide." as upstream she saw both of the pilots exit their craft "Elites" and began walking in their direction, their futuristic weapons drawn at the ready.

Starfire and her patrol scattered. With herself and Adlyn taking cover under the torn off wing while Nightbreak and Eirlys managed to find a spot under a large slab of metal that nopony knew what part it was from and hid there.

Starfire couldn't see very much from where she was under the wrecked wing but she could still very well hear what was going on around her.

There was the rattles of stones as the two Sangheili came closer. "This is not the way things should've gone, brother. I knew that when Dur squadron did not return, the heretics and their human accomplices were in system."

"Indeed. We have lost many to their surprise in-jump, yes, but we will have them on the back foot soon enough and they will scamper like the cowards they are."

Starfire wondered why the these Sangheili were speaking in her language and not the one she had been hearing through the use of her earpiece only to go stiff and keep her breathing as low as possible as she heard the noise of the aliens boots crunching on stones almost right next to her head.

"I cannot recall where the controls for this type is."

There was more the skittling of rocks as one moved.

"This side, brother. Down to the right, the dented one. The one next to the panel you're looking at."

The rending sound of something been torn off caused Starfire and Adlyn to fold their ears. A few moments later, the ramp door groaned as it began to open up, only to suddenly make a screeching noise and to grind to a shrieking halt as the components that made the door open seized and died.

One of the Elites kicked the door while the other grumbled in annoyance.

Coming from within, radio chatter of random transmissions could be heard.

"_Lima 27 to Tango 44, taking small arms fire from the east. Request suppressive fire until we're back in the defilade. How copy?_"

"_Tango 44 copies. Moving upâ€¦|_"

"_Control. Mike 22 repositioning to get a better shot on those Ghostsâ€¦|_"

"_Control copies, Mike 22. Gamma 12, move to waypoint Bravo six and provide overwatch for-_"

"_Tango 42, 43! Orient south west! Covenant tank platoon of two T-26's and three T-58's spotted cresting hill degs twenty nine-_"

"The transport's radio still works," the Elite to the right said. "Which means the heretic crew may have lived and the craft is still functional, and with the DZG down, they can call for help."

"Trust me, they won't. That is why we're here to finish what we started." the other Elite pilot said resolutely, "Cover me as I place the charge."

A louder shuffling and skittering of rocks on the other side of the crashed pelican alerted both of the Elites.

"What was that?"

"I do not know, brother. But it came from over here."

Starfire heard the second Elite ignite its energy sword and walk by, again just inches away from her hiding spot, around the back of the crashed dropship in search for the source of the disturbance.

It wasn't a moment later when there was a growl of surprise, a weighty _thunk_, a groan of pain, then the sound the scattering of rocks as the Elite that went to investigate the noise fell to the ground loudly.

The other Elite bolted upright from what he was doing, Storm rifle drawn and slowly moving cautiously towards the disturbance.
"Kursumee? What- _hurk_."

Starfire didn't hear the rest as the remaining Elite gave out a strained gurgle and collapsed as well.

Poking her head out from her hiding spot, Starfire could see the last Elite was lying dead on the ground and standing over it as well as facing away from her, was an imposingly tall heavily armoured figure in bulky armour and a very aesthetic looking helmet with what looked like a spike or horn protruding from the top of it.

The tall armoured figure flicked blood of the Elite off something that flashed silver in the dark before inserting it somewhere in its shoulder. "_Crash site secure. Going for the antimatter charge._"

"_Roger, Roan Four. When you're done disarming that, join Roan Two by the tail to work on the door._"

"_And what will the rest of you guys be doing?_"

"_We're going to see ourselves to the four equines hiding amongst the wreckage. Starting with the one poking its head out behind you to your left._"

As Starfire heard all this broadcast over her earpiece, there was a bark from what sounded like a dog and crunching sound of boots meeting gravel next to her.

Starfire turned her head up. There she found herself staring back into a thin curved sky blue visor and its accompanying deep maroon red swept back helmet it was part of and it was looking down at her.

* * *

><p>AN: This is late, extremely late I know. And it is only Part 1. **

**Reasons why it took so long is becuae certain things have happened in my life that I had to postpone from writing. **

Halo 5, Tom Clancy's: The Division, my **grandmother being unwell (she's better now) to name a few.
>

**But most of the absence was due to some dickhead cutting my bike chain and stealing my pushbike that I use everyday to get to where I

need to go. Important places. It is my main means of transportation as I don't have a licence, and that bike was the expensive top quality type, not the type you just get from a typical place. That cycleway traveller rough terrain mountainbike was over \$900 worth and some brain dead moron decides that my bike is perfect target to earn some easy low budget cash. The ass might even well have a car and he/she just stole mine to fuel some sort of nasty habit (probably illegal drugs).

>

End
file.